BEYOND BENEVOLENCE: REKINDLING RELATIONSHIPS BETWEEN CHURCH AND COMMUNITY TO ESTABLISH NEW CONNECTIONS OF FAITH BY MEETING OUR NEIGHBORS

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ABSTRACT

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by

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This project, using "New Church Starts" methodology, will reach out to area people surrounding the church, inviting them to become a part of a new contemporary worship service as a way of reaching more people with the Gospel message. The project church will go into the neighborhoods and hold ice cream socials to make contact with the people. The methodology used works for existing churches trying to reach out to their surrounding neighborhoods. Holding the social at the church is not as effective as holding them in the actual neighborhoods, and regular repeated personal encounters and mailings will improve response.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Every life has the opportunity to make a difference. For some it will be how they affected one life, but for others it will be how they will touch the lives of many and will continue to touch lives for generations to come. Those who only touch one life are just as important as those who touch many lives, for one never knows when the next life they touch, for the Gospel of Jesus Christ, will go forward to touch many more.

It is my hope that this work will inspire, at least, that one person who will take up the mantle and touch the lives of many. As I enjoy telling my congregation, "You never know but the one life you touch might be the next Billy Graham."

This project would not have been possible if it were not for the special people who stood up for the Gospel when they agreed to help. Dr. Donnell J. Moore and Dr. Angela D. Washington who guided and encouraged me more than words will ever be able to express; Dr. Melissa Kendrick, Ph.D. and Dr. Steven Kendrick, D.D.S. who agreed to become Professional Associates, gave guidance and insight and faithfully gave of themselves to make the new contemporary service a success; Dr. Janice Meese, D.Min. who also agreed to be a Professional Associate, gave guidance, and who I have had the privilege to travel this journey called ministry with since the beginning of her seminary experience.

The members of the band in the new contemporary service deserve special acknowledgement for their tireless hours of rehearsal two to three times a week and for their leadership in worship, making that service alive with the Gospel for those who

attend. All of the band members and multimedia techs are also very involved elsewhere in the church and they truly make a difference in all the ministries in which they are part.

Without the loving people of St. Matthew United Methodist Church, who allowed me the freedom to reach out and flex my spiritual muscles, this would not have been possible. They are to be thanked for their patience, financial support, and their love, which has allowed me to go to school over the last two and one half years. And a special thanks to the Dealy family who came to help at the ice cream socials, were wonderful company, willingly befriended those who came, and who were a great source of encouragement. And for the love and support of Rev. Wendee Perceful, my wife, associate minister and friend who put up with me when I was tired and grumpy and for her hard work filling in at the church when I needed to work on this project or just get some rest. She was also my first line editor, the one who helps make me look good.

I want to acknowledge my extended family. They helped make me the person I am and gave me the opportunity to grow in the faith. I give thanks for my children and grandchildren who sacrificed time with me and encouraged and inspired me. And last but not least, I thank God who gave me the insight to look beyond what is to see what could be. I thank God for my life and especially my life in Christ Jesus who leads me and sustains me through the Holy Spirit. It is my sincere hope that this project will enable all churches to be there for their children, grandchildren, and great-grandchildren until Christ comes again in glory.

DEDICATION

This project is dedicated to the glory of God and to all the children and grandchildren that God has so gracious given us to lead in the faith and guide into the future.

To Clayton, Jaken, Grayson, Riley Mae, Jaxton, Jaren, Cameron, and the rest of my grandchildren yet to come, I pray that your churches will be beacons of light for all to see and that you take up the mantle as it is passed down from your parents and all who went before you.

ABBREVIATIONS

NCLI	New Church Leadership Institute
NRSV	New Revised Standard Version
NIV	New International Version
UMC	United Methodist Church
ATP	Airline Transport Pilot

INTRODUCTION

Birth is the beginning of all things. It does not matter if it is something made by human hands or if it is part of nature, the beginning of all things can be considered a birth. So what does the birth of a new faith community have to do with the revitalization of an existing church? They are in many ways one in the same. A new church is easily seen as a new birth but we do not readily see the revitalization of a church as a birth. The fact is that the revitalization of a church is exactly that, a new birth.

> Now there was a Pharisee, a man named Nicodemus who was a member of the Jewish ruling council. He came to Jesus at night and said, "Rabbi, we know that you are a teacher who has come from God. For no one could perform the signs you are doing if God were not with him." Jesus replied, "Very truly I tell you, no one can see the kingdom of God unless they are born again."
>
> "How can someone be born when they are old?" Nicodemus asked. "Surely they cannot enter a second time into their mother's womb to be born!"
>
> Jesus answered, "Very truly I tell you, no one can enter the kingdom of God unless they are born of water and the Spirit. Flesh gives birth to flesh, but the Spirit gives birth to spirit. You should not be surprised at my saying, 'You must be born again.' The wind blows wherever it pleases. You hear its sound, but you cannot tell where it comes from or where it is going. So it is with everyone born of the Spirit."
>
> "How can this be?" Nicodemus asked.
>
> "You are Israel's teacher," said Jesus, "and do you not understand these things?"[1]

Rebirth can and does happen all the time. Each time a person reinvents themselves for their job, when they have a blessed new addition to the family, when they

[1] John 3:1-10, New International Version (NIV).

lose part of their family; over and over again people experience rebirth in their lives. Why should it be any different for the church? It should not be.

The church is a living organism and, as such, it is always in a state of flux. One needs to realize, in the church and in peoples' lives, that the only thing that is constant is change. A great t-Shirt says, "Change Is Inevitable" on the front and "But Growth Is Optional" on the back (produced by the students of Perkins School of Theology in 2000).

The business world will say that if a business is not growing it is dying. And far too many of this country's churches are dying. Some are already dead and just have not yet closed the doors.

The Great Commission tells, "Go and make disciple of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teach them to obey everything that I [Jesus] have commanded you."[2] Growing churches is not about building a dynasty or having the biggest congregation; it is about people and their souls. It is about filling the Kingdom of God with believers that God might be glorified. If a church dies, then so might those who God has sent that church to reach.

Too many churches today have lost their first love. They have forgotten their purpose in this world. But for most churches, it is not too late to shed the blinders of the world and return to their first love, God. As churches vision about how they will survive in this economy, where people are leaving the church faster than they are coming, churches need to go back to the root of why they are in business; it is all about relationships. It is not about larger buildings, parking lots, new pews, or carpet. It is about relationships, relationships with God and neighbor.

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[2] Matthew 28:19-20a, New Revised Standard Version (NRSV).

This project is about doing what God has called every church to do, and that is to make disciples for Jesus Christ and to transform a hurting world. But until people introduce the unchurched to Christ, they cannot disciple them. The fewer disciples there are in the world, then the longer it will take for transformation to happen.

Many denominations today focus on starting new churches. They start new churches because new churches attract new people more easily than existing churches with their traditions, who are set in their ways.[3] People are attracted to the excitement of something new. They readily tell their friends about what they have found and encourage them to come and be a part of it.

It is possible to create that same kind of excitement in our existing churches, and new people can be reached using the same methods that church planters use. Just as one lump of coal helps keep another burning hot, so it can be with our existing churches as they reach out into their surrounding communities with love and acceptance.

This document contains the elements of this project's beginning. Chapter one contains the author's story, project context and synergy, showing where these elements overlap, forming the vision that produced this outreach project. Chapter two summarizes dialogue between sources that have written on the subject of church growth over the years. This chapter will help one discern the time frame for changing a church's ethos and getting it to move beyond the walls of the church.

The third chapter brings forth the foundations for the project. It contains the biblical foundation for reaching out to introduce or reintroduce those who have no relationship or no recent relationship with Jesus Christ and His church. It also contains the theological foundation, which shows where God is working in the church to reach

[3] Mark Foster (lecture, New Church Leadership Institute, Fayetteville, AR, October 2007).

people as the church helps transform the world. The theoretical foundation explains the problems that plague the church and freezes it, rendering it unable to fulfill God's mission.

The methodology used in this project is found in Chapter four. It outlines the process to be used in the project. Chapter five, the field experience section, explains what actually happened when the project was set into action. This section also deals with some of the limiting factors that kept the project from using the full potential that New Church Starts Methodology offers. Chapter six contains the author's reflections, summary, and concluding remarks. This chapter is followed by an appendix containing a more detailed contextual analysis of the project area, the story of the project church from its inception through the year 2005, and samples of the postcards used in the promotion of the project, leading to the formation of its new worship service.

CHAPTER ONE

MINISTRY FOCUS

The model that this project shall use is the same model used for a New Church Start. This project will take that same methodology and apply it to a problematic church that is in need of revitalization. The model for a New Church Start is relative in nature. While new churches have been started since the beginning of Christianity, there has not, until recently, been a model that one could use that has been tested and documented.

Not every new church start uses the same model. There are several different approaches to launching a new church, but all of them have some commonalities. They have a pastor, the pastor is there to start the new church, and he or she will have to go out into the community and meet people that can be invited to become a part of the new church. The initial gathering of people who are interested in beginning a new church become the leadership group who will be responsible for the initial thrust into the community to announce the formation of the new church, and they will be the driving force behind the setup and execution of the new worship service. Some of these leaders will continue beyond the initial thrust of the church's beginning and will be future leaders.

The initial leadership team will be broken into service groups that will have responsibility for different areas of the launch. Some will be in charge of setting up the

worship area each week until permanent worship space is found; some will be in charge of hospitality, advertising, children's ministry, and the list goes on.

There are many other parts of the process to start a new church beside these listed above, but this is where the main overlap takes place between starting a new church and revitalizing an existing church. The purpose of starting a new church and the revitalization of an existing church is the same; it is to meet people and introduce them to Jesus Christ. It is, in the author's opinion, in meeting people and inviting them into relationship with Christ and other like-minded individuals, that the existing church has dropped the ball.

Declining attendance and membership indicate that the existing church has ceased, for the most part, to invite new people. The questions every church should ask are why does our membership not invite people into our church and a relationship with Jesus and what can be done to turn it around? There are many reasons why people do not invite others to their church, but most do not because they do not know what to say to make this happen or they are not interested in people joining the church who are not like themselves.

There is a plethora of information on evangelism in the bookstores, and with such information the existing church should be able to reach people. Since this does not seem to be happening, either the information is theoretical or it is not presented in such a manner that is easy to convert into practice. There is also the chance that the existing material is lacking a critical part. There are some books that give great examples of how an existing church can reach out. But with the books that do a good job of explaining how

to put their ideas into action, there are still few existing churches that are growing, at least of those who are more than four or five generations in age.

It is imperative that the churches of Jesus Christ spread the Good News. It is selfish for any Christian to keep the Good News to himself. Jesus gave the disciples a directive to go out into all the world and make disciples of all nations. Therefore, we are called to reach all people, not just those who are in far-off lands but also those who live next door to our churches.

If today's churches can find a simple way to meet the people in the neighborhood around them and get to know them, then they are going to be more apt to invite them into their congregations. If the fear of inviting can be eliminated, or at least eased for the average church member, then going out to fulfill the Great Commission will not seem so risky. This can be done by using non-threatening methods of meeting and greeting people. The persons reaching out can then invite the persons they do not yet know, or have just met, to church.

The focus of this or any ministry effort should be reaching people so that they can be introduced to the gift that God has offered them, the gift of salvation through Christ Jesus. Churches that are focused inward, those who view their church as being selective about who they will or will not invite, will at some point probably die. Today in the Oklahoma Annual Conference of the United Methodist Church and in the North Oklahoma City District of that Annual Conference, there have recently been two new churches started but, at the time of this writing, there were three church buildings sold in the same time frame. Conference-wide, the number of churches being closed each year

heavily overshadows the number of churches being started, and the number of churches whose attendance is dropping is well above those who are seeing growth.

This is not just a problem for The United Methodist Church but is being realized by most, if not all, denominations. It is not a problem of few prospects to invite, but a problem with the Body of Christ not reaching out to those around them. If this project can give hope, inspiration, and direction to the possibility of turning around existing churches, or even help those who are not declining, to continue to grow and reach people for Christ and the transformation of the world, then it has served its purpose in ministry.

The Author's Story

The author was born in late 1950. This was during the height of the church's influence in America. It was reported that as high as eighty percent of all Americans considered themselves Christians, and most of these people claimed regular church attendance.

He was born into a semi-Christian home. His mother was a believer and attended church services at the church of her youth and young adult life. The author never remembered his father displaying any sign of being a believer during his childhood or adolescent years. During his childhood, he only remembers a couple of times when his father attended church. The specific reasons for these visits are unknown and were spread out over several years; it may have been to watch the author and his sister in some production at the church sponsored by the children's ministry.

His first memories of anything spiritual came during the early formative years of his life when his mother took him and his sister to church every week. This early

indoctrination into the religious world was in a Methodist Church in Oklahoma City, Oklahoma. The church that he attended was the same church that his mother attended throughout her childhood and young adult life. This same church continued to be the author's home church until early in the 1990s.

Looking back on his childhood, he has many vivid memories that reach back to as early as three or four years of age. He remembers many details of the church but almost no memory of any teaching during his childhood years. He remembers being in classrooms down in the basement of the old church building. He remembers some of his teachers, but there is no memory of anyone actually teaching anything. There are memories of making Christmas decorations out of construction paper and the coloring of simple pages out of a book that were taken home, but these are all of the memories that exist from his time in Sunday school.

Some teaching must have happened as evidenced by the knowledge of such Bible stories as Noah, Jonah, David and Goliath, and Jesus riding into town on a donkey. Many mainstays of the Christian faith, like Advent and Lent, are missing from his memory. Each Sunday, the three of them sat in the balcony during the worship service. This was a large church that easily seated 400 or more on the main floor with room for about one hundred more in the balcony. The church was full most Sundays, with probably 400 or more persons in attendance.

Worship time was spent singing the songs of the faith and sitting quietly eating candy during the sermon. There are memories of many fellowship dinners in the large fellowship hall directly under the sanctuary, and sunrise breakfast at Rotary Park in the springtime, with his mother's Sunday school class.

His mother's Sunday school class was very active. He has memories of many class parties where he and other children were invited and played. These are the main memories of his childhood in church. He was, as a youth, at church every time the door was open. Every weekend he went to Sunday school and attended Sunday worship. The author regularly attended Methodist Youth Fellowship on Sunday and Wednesday evenings and Sunday evening worship services with his mother and sister.

Each Wednesday evening they would come to church for choir practice. His mother sang in the adult choir and he and his sister sang in the youth choir. There are some distinct memories of his time as a youth in church, but most of those are about running around in the church playing games.

The youth group was very active, and two of the fondest memories of his youth took place through the events of the youth group; they were a Valentine dance where he had his first date and playing for the church's softball team. The church's softball team was an ongoing activity that lasted for many summers. The softball league was competitive and the church team members actively recruited older and stronger young men to play for the team so they would be more competitive. This made it very difficult for a young man in junior high school, who was already over six feet, two inches tall and who only weighed about one hundred twenty-five pounds, to get any playing time. After a few seasons, the church made a rule that you had to be a member of the church to play.

Most, if not all, of the recruited young men stopped coming to church. And one night, when very few people were at church and on the rare occasion when his mother was not there, the author went down front, was baptized, and joined the church so that he could continue to play softball.

The other major memory of the author's youth was a mission trip to the Navajo Indian reservation in New Mexico. Forty people, including sponsors, were involved in the trip, and it was an enjoyable experience.

The author spent much time trying to remember his experiences in the church as a child and youth, but one thing that seems to stick out most is that there is no recollection of Bible teaching or study, except for the few stories previously stated. He believes that there must have been some but does not remember any. He believes that most of his biblical knowledge during this time came from the stories he heard in the pulpit. He was blessed to have had a couple of really engaging preachers during his youth. They were able to hold the attention of the youth, who customarily sat on the front two rows of the church, and the preacher periodically engaged the youth when he preached.

His mother and father divorced when he was twelve years old. Early in his teen years, his father remarried, and on the weekends he was with his father did not attend church. His mother remarried when he was sixteen and her new husband did not attend church. Throughout his early childhood and his teen years, his mother was the spiritual force in his life but only in that she took him to church and made him go. There was never any spiritual talk or Bible reading at home, and after becoming an adolescent there was not any prayer at home, even at bedtime.

Upon reaching eighteen, he joined the United States Naval Reserves and, upon graduation from high school, went to boot camp. He returned home for a year to work and attend reserve meetings before shipping out to Electronics A school in San Francisco, California. During this time, he stopped attending church, and for the next three years, until he got off active duty, he did not attend church.

Even though he did not attend church, he would tell you that he was a Christian if you asked him. During his time in the Navy, he got married at a church, but he and his wife never attended church. For a total of eighteen years, the author attended only on Christmas, Easter, and Mother's Day. The exception was a short time when his marriage began to fall apart, and they began to attend the church of his youth. He hoped it would help hold his marriage together, since they had two young sons.

This did not make the hoped-for difference in his marriage, and he soon found himself divorced. He became the weekend father that his father had been to him; he was loving and caring but not interested in church or spirituality of any kind. During this time, he turned to social life, trying to fill the void in his life. He made a pledge to himself that he would not remarry for at least ten years until he owned his own home. This was to ensure that if a divorce ever happened again, he would not lose everything he had gained.

During this ten-year span, he had several failed relationships and, other than family and close friends, he kept everyone at a distance. But just after one of his failed relationships, he was at the home of a friend one day and her mother come over. He had never met her before and when she walked through the door she pointed to him and said, "You're the reason I was supposed to be here today." She prophesied that God wanted him to be His son. They laid hands on him, and he received the Holy Spirit right there in that living room in the middle of the morning.

Because of this encounter, two things happened: he began reading his Bible each morning and evening, and he started back to church. He went back to the church of his youth because it was comfortable, and he still knew everybody there. He got involved in a Sunday school class and began learning the Bible. He got involved in the life of the

church and began serving on committees and helping out wherever he could. Once again the church had become a mainstay in his life.

During a weekly volleyball game against another church, he met the woman that would soon become his wife. She had two small children and, after he married her, his two sons from his previous marriage came to live with them. In the course of the year, he had gone from being single to married with four children, and this was only the beginning of the blessings that God had in store for him.

She left her church, and they attended his church together. They all became very involved in the life of that church. They gave not just a tithe, but they gave beyond it. He owned his own business at this time, and God began to bless that business. The church was not as affluent as it had been in the 1960s. It was an inner-city church now and the attendance had been dropping for years.

He served on the Finance Committee. One day at the finance meeting, when they were talking about how short funds were, he told the members of the committee that the church needed to evangelize the surrounding neighborhood. One of the pillars of the church stood up and said, "How are they going to help us? They have no money." This church had needed to reach out to the community for many years. The surrounding neighborhoods had been changing for years. Most of the members of the church had moved away to the suburban areas away from the inner city. The area around the church was not being served by any church. The large Baptist church had already moved ten miles south and left their building empty.

The church's lack of compassion for those around them was foreign to his understanding of the Gospel message, and the unwillingness of the church to reach out to an impoverished neighborhood, filled with hurting people, could not even be imagined.

The next committee that he served on was the Council on Ministries, where he served as the co-chair. This committee took care of the activities and the calendar of the church. At their first meeting, the chairperson quit the committee, giving up the chair. Now as the chair of the committee, he began to move through the business of the church for the year. As each event came into question, he would ask who was going to oversee that event and, when no one volunteered, he summarily struck each event from the calendar. This continued until they got to the annual Thanksgiving dinner. When he asked who is willing to oversee that event and nobody offered, he began to strike it from the calendar as well. It was only then that somebody finally said they would oversee the food.

Chairing this committee was another milestone in the author's spiritual maturing. He could not imagine how people in the church could be so unwilling to do anything. Many of the activities that had been dropped from the calendar had been activities that people in the church had supported for many years. It was at this point that he became aware of the lack of commitment by others and began to see how it could suck the enthusiasm out of a new believer. He understood because this was the effect it was having on him. At this point, he began to work hard to keep from losing the fire God placed within him.

One of the things that helped him retain his fire was working with the youth and children. This became an exciting time for him and his entire family. Both he and his

wife were involved, as were his children. The youth group was active at this time with many members and activities.

During this time, the author's pastor approached him and asked if he would be willing to be the liturgist for the next month. He was honored, but this was new and scary. He had not had the opportunity to speak before people in church often. He accepted and served as liturgist occasionally the rest of the time he was at the church. During this time he gained a new appreciation for the job of the pastor. Being in front of a church, he became aware of how deafening the silence seemed from the pulpit. This too was a time of growth for him, as he stepped out in faith believing God would equip him to do what he had been called to do. God was faithful in equipping him, and he became surer of himself and his faith.

Another thing that helped him keep his fire burning hot was a seventy-two hour spiritual retreat called the Walk to Emmaus. His wife had heard about this spiritual retreat and, rather than ask him if he would go, she told him he was going. She did inform him that there was a two-year waiting list for women whose husbands would not go on the walk with them. They took couples first. The men and women participate separately and, as it is the custom in this community, the men went first. It was a very interesting and challenging weekend, where he learned more about God than he believed he had ever known. He left this weekend with his enthusiasm rekindled and ready and willing to serve wherever God needed him.

The Walk to Emmaus became a significant part of his spiritual journey. After a short time working in the background, he was asked to serve on a team in the conference room. That was one of many times that he served. While serving at a table on one such

spiritual weekend, he listened to the speaker and thought to himself "Didn't anybody preview this talk? I cannot imagine how we allowed such an incomprehensible talk as this one to be given." Each walk team spends many weekends previewing every talk, giving feedback to the speaker to make them as good as can be. While he was caught up thinking about the quality or lack thereof of this talk, one of the pilgrims sitting next to him turned to him and said, "God, I needed to hear that." At this point all he could do was look towards heaven and realize that that talk was not for him but had been received by exactly the person God had intended to receive it. This was a growing moment.

Each walk, while the same, is different. Each walk brings new challenges and with these new challenges come new facets of faith. It was during one of these walks, while serving, that he earnestly began to discern his call to ordained ministry.

He continued working in the church, and his heart continued to go out to the people of the surrounding neighborhood. He arranged three excursions into the area around the church. Each one was attended by fewer and fewer members of his Sunday school class and no one from the body of the church. But they did manage to reach two or three new families. The neighborhood was impoverished and, during the summer, the middle school remained open to feed the children lunch. This may have been the only meal that some of these children received during the week. This beckoned the question, "Where do these children eat on weekends?"

His heart began to go out to these children, and he questioned how he could make a difference. The answer came almost immediately. He could cook for them each Sunday, and they could offer a small choir or Sunday school program for them. The church had hired a youth director whose father, a compassionate and giving man, owned two

McDonalds restaurants. He graciously offered to supply pancake mix and sausage each Sunday to feed these needy children.

He went to the church and asked permission to feed the neighborhood children. He waited a week and then another week for an answer. He waited a month and then another month and still no answer. The youth in the church began moving away. Their families started going to churches closer to their homes that had many more children, many of whom were their friends. The youth group was shrinking and was finally down to a point where his children and the pastor's daughter were the only youth left. His wife approached him and told him that their children needed a youth group and urged him to look for another church. It was a difficult decision, to leave the only church he had ever known, but they decided to make the move and started attending a church that had only begun three years before.

A year had passed since he had asked the urban church to allow him to feed the children. After leaving the church, he got a call from the pastor who told him that they would like to try feeding the children on Sundays. The pastor asked if he would be willing to come back and cook. He said he would because he could still cook, get cleaned up, and make it to his new church for Sunday school and worship with his family. He had been told that they only wanted to try feeding the children once a month. Disappointed, he still agreed but knew in his heart that the chance of it being successful was slim. The kids were not hungry just once a month but were hungry every week.

Over the course the next few months, he cooked for all who showed up. They did not advertise in the neighborhood, so only the people from the Hispanic Mission Church that worshiped at the church attended. There were twelve to fifteen on a good day, with

about six or seven children on average. Six months later, they cancelled the program and counted it a failure. During this entire time, no one else from the church came to help.

He was trying to discern what God had called him to, and it was made complicated due to the fact that he was having a hard time in business. He had received a large financial blessing, but he did not recognize the blessing that he had received. It would have been best used paying off all of his business debts and using the remainder of the money to go to school.

Even during this time of difficulty, when his reinvestment did not pay off, God continued to bless him. He loved to fly and already had a private pilot license. God made a way for him to continue getting the rest of his pilot's licenses. He was in the mattress manufacturing business, and during this time he was selling more mattresses at the airport than he was selling to his dealerships or out of his own retail stores. The mattresses sold at the airport were traded for flight time and instruction. Through these sales, he received all the licenses one could get except for an ATP or a Type rating.

So was God calling him to be an Aviation Missionary? Why else would God make it possible for him to fly and receive these licenses? In hindsight, it became easy for him to see that God knew he enjoyed flying and gave him a much needed break from the rigors of trying to dig out of the business mess that he had gotten himself into.

He was at St. Andrews UMC, the new church that his family had joined, when he finally answered the call to full time ministry. After much discernment, he decided to answer the call. He went to his pastor and asked if he could work at the church as an Associate Pastor. He knew that the Senior Pastor needed help, and he was willing to work for free, just to get some experience. He was told that it would be some time before they

would hire anyone; it was not in the budget. So, he went back to tending his business. He had plenty of work to do making the business ready for sale, as he went back to school to finish his Bachelor's degree.

Three weeks later, his pastor called him and offered him a job as the Associate Pastor in the church. It was amazing to see how God worked. He was told they could only pay him seven dollars an hour, and the job was a ten hour per week job. He did not care about the money; he would have worked for nothing just to get the experience. He dove in and did all he could to learn and help make the ministries in the church better. It was not unusual for him to put in twenty or more hours a week for the church, after working a full day and going to school.

St. Andrews was the only church that he was ever involved with where the people in the church were as involved as he was. They were willing to invite, serve, and do mission work outside the church. The church was growing by leaps and bounds. It was the fastest growing United Methodist Church in the Oklahoma Annual Conference for several years. While on church staff, going to school, and still running his business, he got a call from the District Superintendent, asking him if he would serve as an interim pastor at a two-point charge for nine weeks. Without taking anything off of his plate, he agreed to take the two churches and drove forty miles, each way, twice a week to serve these churches. This was quite a blessing, as he gained great insight into serving a church and how to read the people in those churches.

The smaller of the two churches was a church of only eighteen, and the larger had an average worship attendance of fifty-four. The smaller of the two churches was the most loving, most willing to serve, and took the best care of each other. They were

willing to interact with the larger church in Bible studies and fellowship, but the larger church would never go to the smaller church for anything, with the exception of about two families. In the larger church, some people quickly rushed to align themselves with the new pastor. They all came off as being sincere people, but it did not take long to realize that they were seeking power. The people in this church, like most churches, were unwilling to be involved either in things in church or outside the church.

His undergraduate work began to wind down and he went to see his District Superintendent to tell him that he was entering seminary. At this time, he asked that he be appointed to a church. His business was in Newcastle, Oklahoma, and there was a nice little Methodist Church in that town. Almost kiddingly, he told the District Superintendent that this church would make a great first appointment for him. He thought that he could serve this church while he was still winding down his business. But the District Superintendent told him that church was being served by an Elder and that there would be no chance of him having that church as an appointment. But God intervened, and six weeks later he received a call from the District Superintendent asking him if he could be in Newcastle that Wednesday by 7:00 p.m. to meet with the Staff Parish Relations Committee because that was going to be his new appointment. Elated, he said yes.

One day, when he was in Oklahoma City, he stopped at a 7-11 to get a Coke. He was getting into his car when an old little league baseball adversary pulled up next to him. He had coached against this man and his team for five years. He literally had one leg in the car trying to get out of there, but the man wanted to talk and he began telling him about his life and his divorce. Doing everything he could to leave, short of being

discourteous, he was still looking for ways to get away when he heard the man say, "And then I found Jesus," Then he answered in his mind, "Yes, Lord, I have time to listen."

The man asked him what he was doing, and he informed him that he had gone into ministry and that he was trying to sell his property in Newcastle. The man told him that he knew a man in Tuttle, ten miles to the west, who was looking for a larger place. He gave the man his business card and told him to have the man give him a call. He was thinking to himself, "What were the odds that somebody in Tuttle, a town smaller than Newcastle, would be looking for a larger building and what were the odds that they would actually call?"

Within a week, the man called, looked at the property, and a week later signed a lease with a purchase option at full asking price. Up to this point, the author would have been willing to sell the property for just what was owed at the bank, which was about one third of the selling price. This was a relief because up till now, he had been almost at the end of his rope financially when God stepped in as if to say, "Don't worry. I will take care of you."

It was summertime, and the author found himself in Local Pastors Licensing School. Having been in business for himself for twenty-one years, being the boss was not a new position for him. The only difference this time was that he was back to working with volunteers, as he had been at his local church. Since he would be traveling to Dallas, Texas, each week for the next three years, to finish his seminary experience, the church hired the first secretary in its history. This was quite a blessing, especially as school started back and the course work became much more demanding.

His new appointment consisted of the original 4000 square foot building built in 1972 and a new sanctuary that was only four years old. Originally the new sanctuary was planned to seat 250 people, but due to a lack of funds the conference required them to downsize the new addition to a size that they could more easily afford. The new sanctuary had brought relief from the overcrowding of the old sanctuary that only seated sixty-five people. Now they could easily accommodate, at one hundred percent capacity, approximately 185 people. While this new sanctuary was a blessing, the church was completely out of classrooms, office space, and adequate space to fellowship.

The first year at this church, he brought forth a building plan that would double the size of their original church building. This would add new offices, four large classrooms, a prayer room, and a large youth room. The plan would double the parking lot and, by remodeling the existing building, the fellowship hall would be more than doubled in size. This first year was a busy time in his life. The beginning of the building project found everybody enthusiastic about the new building, but as time went on twenty percent of the congregation left the church.

When he first arrived, the church worshiped between sixty and sixty-five people each Sunday. Within six months the attendance had shot up to over ninety, and by Christmas the average was well over one hundred fifteen, they even experienced three Sundays with attendance over 150. Even after losing twenty percent of the congregation, the church's attendance figures were still higher than they had been in years. But this exodus was puzzling. The new addition to the building was something that everyone in the church agreed upon. So what happened? He could not and still does not understand why these people left, no matter how hard he prayed. But the building continued.

Some of his first encounters with parishioners had been with some of the younger people in leadership. While they wanted the new building, they quickly informed him they did not want their church to grow, "We like our church just the way it is." Hearing this, he questioned how any Christian could not have a heart for reaching out to other people. It was not that they would not accept people, but they were not interested in reaching anyone who was not like them socially and economically.

Officially and unofficially, the patriarch and the matriarch of the church were in charge. These two founding members decided what would or would not happen at church. The patriarch had wanted a new addition for years and was solidly on board with building the new addition, and he championed the cause. One day the patriarch, while working alongside the author, told him that he was the second-best pastor they had ever had. This vote of confidence and assurance that he was doing a good job were short-lived. A year later, before the building was completed, he crossed swords with the patriarch several times. He went from being the second-best pastor the church had ever had to being the sorriest person who ever walked the face of the earth.

What went wrong? What had he done that was so bad that the patriarch would not even speak to him? The people on the building committee began to pick sides, forgetting that they all serve the same God. Early in the year, the patriarch was hospitalized, and they found that he had cancer. As his pastor, the author went to the hospital to visit him and was not even allowed in his room. The man saw him coming down the hallway and became extremely agitated, yelling at the top of his lungs for him to go away. It was discovered that for some time his oxygen saturation levels had been less than adequate, and this is probably what affected his ability to think rationally.

The patriarch was released from hospital and did come back to church. He only lasted two weeks before the cancer got the best of him. His passing changed the complexion of the church. A fellow pastor once said, "Every day I give thanks for blessed additions and blessed deletions." Some people in that community would not come to church because of that one person. One of the most noticeable changes to that church was that it became a much more loving church where people reached out.

Reaching out to others was important to the author. He began taking the church on a mission trip to Mexico each year. It was during these trips, he began to notice the hearts of the people in the church beginning to change. Maybe it was seeing abject poverty firsthand or maybe it was just spending a full week with other people trying to make a difference. Each time a team returned home, they could not help but share what they had seen and experienced and how God had touched their hearts through these poor people. As the hearts of the people in the church began to change, new people once again began attending.

A young girl, just twelve years old who had gone on the first mission trip, approached him and inquired if she could start a neighborhood food bank. This would be her project to earn a merit badge for Girl Scouts, but even more it would benefit the community. He was excited about the project, and she went at it with a passion. By the second year, it was *the* food bank for the community and still functions today twelve years later.

Christian education, reaching and teaching the children, was important to him. He approached the director of children's programs about a new concept for teaching the children. He became interested in this, especially since he had given the high school and

junior high school class a Serendipity Bible to study. The Serendipity Bible has two levels of Bible study built in, beginner and advanced. He asked the high school group to work through the advanced studies, and the junior high to work through the beginner lessons. Three weeks later the teacher of the senior high Sunday school class informed him that the high school could not do the advanced studies. The senior high students did not know enough about the Bible, so they joined the junior high in studying the beginner lessons.

He questioned how our children could be spending all this time in Sunday school and not learning the Bible. There was a new innovative study system for younger children on the market, which had become popular. It was called Rotation Sunday school. He approached the children's director and her committee, and they quickly got onboard. They completely revamped the old Sunday school wing, which had now been dedicated to the children, and spent the summer converting it into something spectacular. The children enjoyed this new concept in learning. But as they graduated into the youth group, it became apparent that the amount of biblical knowledge they possessed had not greatly improved.

During a discussion about their teaching, it was brought to light that it was not a problem with the curriculum but with the parents. The parents only brought the children, on average, one out of every four Sundays. This astounding fact was both a huge revelation and disappointment. He knew that the same was true about worship attendance but had not translated it to Sunday school.

The church continued to grow slowly until attendance was back in the nineties. The slow growth was in part due to burnout on the author's part, a lack of days off with

little vacation had taken its toll. The problems and pressures of the job were taking the life out of him. Out of a need for survival, he coasted for almost a year. It was time to get back in the saddle. As a friend put it, it was time to reinvent himself once more.

The city was building a new middle school just behind the church, and he saw this as the perfect opportunity and place to focus the church's energy in the coming year. Many of the children did not have anywhere to go after school except home to an empty house. Those children who played sports could not go home and were not allowed to stay in the school; they would just hang out for a couple of hours outside the school or walk a mile or more to the Taco Mayo.

There was a gentleman in the church who worked setting up "Title 1" programs across the country. These programs gave children a place to go, something to do, a snack, and help with their schoolwork. He was willing to help get this program started at the church. He ran cost analysis and projections, and it was determined that out of the 600 potential students it would only require twenty students per week at five dollars per day each to break even. Time was moving quickly; it was the end of the school year, so they determined to wait until fall to begin.

Having served the church for eight years and, since it was March, he felt fairly confident that they would leave him in this appointment for another year. That month he went with his wife to Phoenix, Arizona, where she received recognition for outstanding performance with her employer. While they were there, he received a call on his cell phone from his District Superintendent. Much to his surprise, he was offered a move to a different church just twenty-six miles away. It was a larger church with a completely different demographic. He was asked to pray and get back with the District

Superintendent as quickly as possible. He told her that he would pray, but if that is where God wanted him, he would go.

For various reasons, he had to wait almost a month before he could tell the people in his church that he had been reappointed. The move was both exciting and difficult. Leaving this church was like losing a family. One member on the Staff Parish Relations Committee was so unhappy about losing him as their pastor, he called and complained to the District Superintendent, firmly expressing his displeasure.

The author and his wife had the opportunity to meet with the leadership of the new church over coffee and dessert. He also met his new staff and began making arrangements to move. This new church was quite different from the last one. The previous pastor had done a great job of readying the church for the transition. The transition went smoothly with few changes in the beginning. They had just installed new multimedia equipment and, since he had introduced and installed such equipment at his previous church, it was easy to get them up to speed.

One of the first challenges that he found was much akin to a problem that he had at the previous church, a lack of children in Sunday school. This time he was determined to change that. So he spent much time alone with God each morning in the sanctuary praying for guidance and direction. This increase in intentionality in his prayer life made a major difference in his stress level and made him more confident in the work he was doing in the church. Where God was leading this church was not clear. It did not take long before it became apparent that he needed to start at the beginning, preaching and teaching basic theology.

Prior to changing churches, he had been given the opportunity to go to New Church Leadership Institute. He was not sent because to become a church planter but because he might someday be instrumental in supporting the birth of a new faith community for the conference. Through this process, it became apparent, from what he had learned at the conference, that the same model that is used to start new churches could also be used to revitalize existing churches. He began waiting and praying for God's confirmation of this revelation.

The Context

The context for this project, Saint Matthew United Methodist Church, in Midwest City, Oklahoma, is the home of Tinker Air Force Base, one of the largest employers in the state of Oklahoma. Tinker is one of the major Air Logistics Depots in the country and is responsible for the maintenance of the Air Force's fleet of E3A aircraft along with their fleet of KC-135 air tankers. It is also home to the United States Navy's E6A aircraft, the Navy's version of the E3A.

Midwest City is separated from Oklahoma City by Del City, which is approximately five miles wide. Saint Matthew United Methodist Church lies only seven miles from downtown Oklahoma City. The Church was formed in 1952 and has had performed major building expansions since its inception. The last major building program was the new sanctuary that was completed in 1992. The old sanctuary, architecturally an A frame type building remains as a versatile and usable part of the church. It is used for fellowship meals, when there are large gatherings that will not fit into the fellowship hall, and as an extension of the Sunday school classrooms.

The church is surrounded by neighborhoods built in the 1970s and 80s and by several apartment complexes, which tend to house young military families and the poor. The church is made up of mostly middle-class families, some active duty military, some retirees, and retired military personnel. The majority of attendees who are still working, who are not active duty military personnel, are either employed directly by Tinker Air Force Base or by a company that supports Tinker Air Force Base's mission.

The median age of the state's population is slightly over thirty-six years of age. The per-capita income in 2005 was $29,948, which was $4,523 less than the national average.[1] Midwest City sits in eastern Oklahoma County, and the statistics for Oklahoma County and Oklahoma City are virtually the same. The median household income for Oklahoma County in 2004 was $37,967, and that is $858 above the state average with 15.2 percent of the population living below the poverty level, which is 1.2 percent higher than the state average.[2] The number of high school graduates in the year 2000 was 82.5 percent, which is 1.9 percent above the state average, and those with a bachelor's degree or higher was 25.4 percent and that is 5.1 percent above the state average. The average Oklahoma County resident travels just over 20 minutes to work each day, which is equal to the state average.[3]

Oklahoma County encompasses more than just one city. The greater Oklahoma City metro area actually covers several counties and includes several smaller cities. Midwest City is just one of several cities that make up greater Oklahoma City. The

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[1] Oklahoma Background Statistics, http://www.statemaster.com/state/OK-oklahoma/peo-people.html (accessed January 12, 2011).

[2] Oklahoma County Statistics, Mapstats, http://www.fedstats.gov/qf/states/40/40109.html (accessed January 12, 2011).

[3] Ibid.

population of Midwest City in 2007 was 55,935. The gender breakdown was 47.8 percent male and 52.2 percent female. The ethnic breakdown for Midwest City is 67.6 percent White; 19.5 percent Black; 5.9 percent American Indian; 4.2 percent Multiracial; and 4.1 percent Hispanic.[4] The median age for Midwest City was 34 in 2007, which is slightly lower than the state's median age. This is possibly due to the large number of young Air Force men and women living in the area.

A large shopping mall, in fact the only mall in the immediate area, is now defunct. An F-6 tornado hit the area on May 3, 1999, and wiped out a large percentage of the shopping district on Southwest 29th Street, which faces the northern boundary of Tinker Air Force Base. As the city leaders grasped the opportunity to rebuild this decaying part of town, it caused a ripple effect that effectively killed the mall. Almost every single business in the mall moved to the new strip shopping center on 29th Street. This single disaster reshaped the complexion of the city and the shopping trends and traffic patterns of its residence.

There are one 158 churches in the Mid-Del area. Midwest City and Del City combine several vital municipal systems and the area is now known as the Mid-Del area. Saint Matthew, the project church, is located near the old retail center of Midwest City. It is two blocks north of the intersection of Reno Avenue on Air Depot Boulevard. Five of the founding members of the church still attend and are faithfully active each week. The church currently has 1050 members on the membership roles. Average weekly attendance is around 230, combined in two worship services each Sunday. The gender breakdown

[4] City Data for Midwest City, Oklahoma, http:// www.city-data.com/city/Midwest-City-Oklahoma.html (accessed January 11, 2011).

according to church membership roles was fifty-six percent female and forty-four percent male.

The church experienced some financial problems, and the need for a new roof, in 1998 at a cost of $133,000, left the church in a precarious financial position. The new sanctuary had been paid for through the issuance of bonds, which were drawing a high rate of interest. In an effort to pay for the new roof, the bonds were recalled, and the sanctuary and roof were refinanced. The new roof fixed some of the leakage problems for a time, but it was only temporary as most all leaks came back. The roofing contractor made only a half-hearted effort to correct the problems. The author, upon arriving at the church as its new pastor, acquired a debt in excess of $530,000.

Over the years prior to the previous pastor coming to the church, attendance had been dropping and the finances of the church had followed suit. The previous pastor had been brought in to correct the problems, which were not only financial but also organizational. He did a marvelous job of reorganizing the finances and the rest of the church, but attendance did not recover. Therefore many adjustments had to be made to the budget.

The church is attended by about one-third retired persons. Many of these attendees are retired military, and of those most were officers. Over half of those attending are still active in the work force and half of them have children; the other attendees are youth and children. The church has a good mix generationally, and they interact well together.

Church school attendance over the past ten years has been between eighty-three and 108. The children's Sunday school had only eight active children in 2008. Adult

Sunday school has declined from 125, at its ten-year high, to sixty but in just the last year new small groups have been started. The first-semester based small groups brought 172 into Bible study each week. The attendance of the youth group had grown over the last ten years from a low of nine to a high of forty-three and is currently holding at about twenty-three.

Worship attendance has remained somewhat constant over the last ten years. Membership on the other hand has grown by about fifty members over the same time frame. This lack of growth in worship may be due, in part, to the flux of the military in the church's membership and their reassignments. During the last ten years the worship average dipped to 215 in 2006 and is currently in the 220 average attendance range. The church is blessed with three or more visitors per week on the average. They are welcomed and contacted after the service but continued contact is rare.

The church is surrounded by many apartments. Many of them are gated, due to the perceived crime rate. The higher end apartments are usually occupied by military officers and younger executive couples. Some of the lower income apartments attract low ranking enlisted military personnel, as stated before and blue-collar workers.

While all persons are welcome at Saint Matthew United Methodist Church, those who live in the upscale apartments are people that the church population would seek out and invite, if they were to invite anyone. Those who live in the lower income apartments are also welcome but few church members are willing to reach out to them and invite them to church.

The church, at one point in its history, was active in missions inside and outside the church. They made repeated trips to Alaska and Mexico to work with the natives,

helping them build churches and houses. The church was instrumental in beginning a yearly summer youth project, "Youth Force," where they worked in Oklahoma County, doing repairs on people's homes that do not have the resources to keep them up. Over a three-year period leading up to 2008, the youth continued to work on homes of the elderly and poor, and the rest of the church turned inward to concentrate on its economic problems.

The one place the church, as a whole, did not turn inward was in their annual Pumpkin Patch and Festival. Each year they sell pumpkins and hold a festival selling crafts, baked goods, and food. The money raised at the patch and festival, goes to local missions through grants. Many originations apply for grants, and the grant committee looks over the applications in January each year and makes awards. The committee granted more than $20,000 in 2010.

The racial demographics of the church, while diverse, are not in line with the surrounding population. These demographics have begun to change in the last ten months but still are not in line with the population. It will be important, in the future, that the church begins to reach out to the surrounding area, since many of the members that attend no longer live within a five mile radius of the church. It is important that the church starts to focus outwardly.

The Synergy

All Christians are called to be ministers in the world. Some are called to professional ministry but all are called. All Christians have gifts. They do not all have the same gifts; therefore, gifts are diverse, so that all the needs in the church will be

addressed. When one looks about the church, most any given church, one can find people who have the skill sets and temperament to do whatever is needed. So why are there so few workers and why is the church always looking for some person to fill this need or that need?

Originally, persons who claimed to be Christians were in love with Jesus and the church. Many were on fire for Jesus, willing to do whatever was needed to expand the cause of Christ. It is akin to being in love before marriage. At first one cannot stand to be separated from their love, and they want to be in constant contact with their love all of the time. They sit close to each other, but after a period of time most lose that desire to be so close. They have other things to do and often just want to get on with life. They are still in love, but the form it takes is not as heated. Over time emotion tends to become cooler. This cooling of affection is like the story of the old farmer and his wife riding down the road in his pickup truck. His wife asked about their lack of closeness, "We used to sit close to one another." He replies, "I'm not the one what moved. I am still where I have always been, driving the truck. You are the one who has moved." God probably feels the same way. God has not moved; only some of the professed people of God have moved away and thus lost their fire. This is what the church, at Saint Matthew UMC and many others in the United States, are like. Since the church is the gathering of all believers, then it looks like many or most Christians have gotten cool.

Some Christians feel that there is so much to be done that the task seems undoable. This causes many to take on an attitude of, "I cannot do it, so why try?" Maybe the Body of Christ should look at ministry as a giant cake. Few people would see the ability to eat the whole cake in one sitting as something they could do, but they would not

have a problem seeing that they could eat it one bite at a time, day after day. While it is not a verse from the Bible, there is a saying that makes good sense theologically, "God doesn't call the equipped, God equips the called." People have heard this most of their lives. There are verses in the Bible that would support this saying such as, "And my God will fully satisfy every need of yours according to his riches in glory in Christ Jesus."[5]

Reverend Perceful has been called to professional ministry and has been appointed to Saint Matthew United Methodist Church, in Midwest City, Oklahoma. Saint Matthew United Methodist Church has remained stagnant in attendance for the last ten years.

As already discussed, they are a friendly group of people who do much to support the community. The annual Pumpkin Patch in 2008 raised $16,000 that is reserved for local outreach. Many groups in the community apply for the "Pumpkin Grants." The money they receive is earmarked to support the less fortunate in the community. This money has gone to the Mid-Del Food Bank, Masters Market, the Pastor's Discretionary Fund, and other agencies, all of which is intended as a stopgap measure for those persons falling short of being able to meet basic needs.

They are like most churches. They have several sacred cows, things they have always done. Some of these are really good, and some probably would not be missed, especially by newcomers that had never been a part of them. They have a welcoming group and a follow up group that calls the new visitor on the day they visited. While they look like an open church, they are not good at visiting with new people until they have been there for several months, unless the new people are very outgoing. Everyone is

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[5] Philippians 4:19 (NRSV).

welcome in worship, but for the most part, this church is not interested in reaching out evangelistically to people in the area that are less fortunate than they.

Statistically, one knows that the older a church is, the less likely the people in that church are to invite anyone to church. The statistics for invitation are about one person invited for every seven people in the church for the first five years of the church's life. Between five and ten years, this number drops to one for each sixteen people in the church attendance. And from ten to twenty years of age, the number falls to one for each thirty-eight. Beyond twenty years of age, it is one for every seventy plus people.[6] According to these statics, church growth is almost impossible for most churches if invitation is required. Statistically, it is harder to get members who have stopped attending to come back to church than it is to get new members.[7] This is quite a dilemma for any church, and Saint Matthew United Methodist Church is in the midst of such non-growing churches.

This church has maintained the status quo for many years. They are currently not in survival mode, but they are not reaching many new people for Jesus Christ. There are many people in the area, which could even walk to church, yet they are not being invited. They are welcome if they show up, but that is not really welcoming; it is more like a feeling of being tolerated. There are many children around the church, and yet there were only fifteen to twenty children in Vacation Bible School last year, mostly the children and grandchildren of the church's members.

Reverend Ron Perceful came out of an affluent church of the 1950s. Today that same church is trying to survive. Its attendance is down from 400 in the 1950s to about

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[6] Mark Foster (lecture, New Church Leadership Institute, Fayetteville, AR, 2008)..

[7] Bob Crossman (lecture, New Church Leadership Institute, Fayetteville, AR, 2008).

forty today. In 1987, when he was still a layperson attending there, the church bounced back from about 140 attendees to around 200. At that time, the church had a very dynamic pastor but after only two years, he left the United Methodist Church for another denomination where he became a church planter and today has a church of 3000. When this dynamic pastor left the church, so did many of the members. Looking back, again, on the several committees in the church on which the author served, one of them was the finance committee. During a meeting, he engaged the members about reaching out to the surrounding community. And he was quickly informed that they were not wanted, because they had no money and could not help the financial position of the church. Statically, the poor give a higher percentage of their income to support their church than the wealthy.[8] To have evangelized the neighborhood at that time would probably have averted the eventual demise that that church now faces.

As discussed earlier, there are many children in that area of his home church, and many of them do not get regular meals at home. Many of them only get fed when they go to school, so the public school stays open during the summer to serve lunch to these children. Ron wanted to reach out to them and feed them on Sunday mornings. But the church was not interested. They were inwardly focused, worrying about their finances, and they were also fighting a Hispanic Mission Church that met at their church. They felt that the Hispanic church only used them and gave nothing back. They had become so myopic that they had lost sight of who they are supposed to be in Jesus Christ. The things that they seemed afraid of may have been the things that could have saved the church.

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[8] Generous Giver, http://library.generousgiving.org/page.asp?sec=28&page (accessed March 11, 2011).

This lack of initiative outreach seems to be the problem in many churches, and Saint Matthew United Methodist Church does not seem to be any different when it comes to making disciples for Jesus Christ. So the questions is asked, how does a church reach a neighborhood that is truly in need of Jesus Christ when the majority of the congregation is only interested in maintaining the status quo? Why did God and the Cabinet of the Oklahoma Annual Conference send the author to Saint Matthew United Methodist Church? What skills and abilities and what past experiences makes this the right appointment for him?

The answer lies in past experience and a past and future desire to reach people for Jesus Christ. The melding of the past and future will be the answer to filling a void that exists in the current congregation. Reverend Perceful must have the ability to think outside the box, for this is what it will take to change the present situation. And he must understand that, as important as it is that the church reaches people for Jesus Christ of all ages, races, and gender, it is also important to take care of those currently in the church. These are the people who have devoted their lives and their resources making this church what it is today.

All people, those inside the church and those outside, are of equal worth. Therefore it is important that efforts be made to fit all God's people into God's church. This will take changing the hearts of those in the church, and it will mean finding a way to engage those outside the church and get them to mingle. Not mingling in just a social sense but mingle as persons coming together, as those who truly love and honor each other. As these opportunities for ministry are worked out, God will truly reign in this church and neighborhood. One of the possibilities for making this work out is to add a

new worship service but with a difference. The worship service would be formed out of persons who do not currently belong to the church; they would hopefully be persons who live in the neighborhood.

Saint Matthew United Methodist Church has two sanctuaries, which gives it a unique advantage. When starting new worship services, it gives them more options. Therefore, a new faith community of worshippers could meet and worship at the same time as the current congregation or at a different time where the services overlap slightly. There would then be opportunities for the two worshipping bodies to get together and learn to love one another as brothers and sisters in Christ at socials and in missions.

CHAPTER TWO

THE STATE OF THE ART IN THIS MINISTRY PROJECT

Many authors have written on the process of turning around a dying church and growing a church. Most authors this author has read have a common thread; it takes a long time to turn around a dying church. Time is a commodity that some churches do not have if they are to survive. Every minute that the Christian church waits to reach people for Jesus Christ equals many untold people who will never hear the Gospel message and have the opportunity to accept the grace being offered.

Not all past research on church growth is relevant to today's economy. Some of the research, while good for its time, is no longer relevant due to changing social and economic considerations. Nancy Ammerman, in her book *Congregation & Community,* quotes Gaylord Noyce in a study of urban churches taken in the 1970s. Noyce saw only four options for churches: "(1) become a metro church (what we will call a 'niche congregation'), (2) decline, (3) adapt, or (4) move."[1] There is probably a better solution to the continued existence of an urban church, and that is to evangelize the surrounding community. Some churches have done this successfully.

One must be careful to discern the validity of older scholarship. The author of *Leading Causes of Life* says that there are some churches in downtown Memphis, Tennessee, who have turned around their churches by reaching out to the neighborhoods

[1] Nancy Tatom Ammerman, *Congregations & Community* (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 1999), 43.

around them. One might refer to this as adapting, but it is more about being relational and realizing that all are accepted in the eyes of God.

John P. Kotter, in his book *Leading Change,* says that growth is undermined by complacency. He cites the case of a pharmaceutical company going through such times. Management talks about how sales are up ten percent and things are looking good for the future but disregards the facts that profits were down thirty percent over the last five years and industry wide profits were up twenty percent.[2] This does not seem different from most of our churches today. *Leading Change* was written to the business community but is valid for any organization. Noyce saw four options for urban churches, but if their demise is due to complacency then Kotter announces nine causes of complacency. They are (1) No highly visible crisis existed; (2) Meetings take place in rooms that scream success; (3) The standards against which these managers measured themselves were far from high; (4) The organizational structure focused most people's attention on narrow functional goals instead of broad business performance; (5) The various internal planning and control systems were rigged to make it easy for everyone to meet their functional goals; (6) Whatever performance feedback people received came almost entirely from these faulty internal systems; (7) When enterprising young employees went out of their way to collect external performance feedback, they were often treated like lepers; (8) Complacency was supported by the very human tendency to deny that which we do not want to hear; and (9) Those who were relatively unaffected by

[2] John P. Kotter, *Leading Change* (Boston, MA: Harvard Business School Press, 1996), 40.

complacency sources 1-8, and thus concerned about the firms future, were often lulled back into a false sense of security by senior management's "happy talk."[3]

In *Congregations & Community,* Nancy Ammerman begins by delving into the health of the churches in her study. She says, "The question of congregational health may best be answered by looking at the whole population of congregations, assessing how the entire array best fits a changing environment."[4] She goes on to say, "Of those currently experiencing serious declines in membership and resources, all have either actively resisted change or have continued with existing patterns, apparently unable to envision how things might be different."[5] She confesses that some of these churches may see a new location as a means of survival rather than engaging the neighborhood around them. This last option is only viable if the church has the financial ability to make such a change. Not many older church buildings in the inner city are going to bring the church enough money, through its sale, to make such a transition. Kotter addresses similar issues in his book and says that one of the leading issues is that the firms he cites are unable to "take into account the speed of market and technological change."[6]

Reaching out to the surrounding community seems like the best possible answer to turn around a declining church. But what makes a church take so long before it reaches out? According to the consulted authors, hereafter referenced as the experts, it is a matter of getting the professed people of God to come together and be on the same page about the need to reach out. This may be, at least in part, due to the fact that most people like

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[3] Ibid., 39-41.

[4] Ammerman, *Congregations*, 321.

[5] Ibid., 323.

[6] Kotter, *Leading*,.55.

their churches the way they are and are afraid that bringing in new people may change things. During the period of time this author was working on this project, it became abundantly apparent that the experts were right, at least to some degree. So what do the experts say on the subject?

One of the first experts consulted is Alice Mann, author of *Raising the Roof* and presenter of conferences by the same name. Having read and attended two "Raising the Roof" conferences, this seems a good place to begin. The author and speaker says that it will take the average church about three years or more to get to a place where they will be ready to begin evangelizing, reaching out beyond the walls of the church. She says that the process of getting a plan of action ready will take eight months before it is even brought before a formal board for action.[7] Why so long? Most people like to remain where they are comfortable. A church that is healthy may take longer because there is no sense of urgency. A church that sees itself in a declining situation will be more motivated to begin researching what it will take to reach out for new members.

The process of moving a body of people to a place where they are mostly in agreement requires considerable time because people change their minds and reform their opinions slowly about things they do not agree with or that they are unfamiliar with. Mark Sellon in *Redeveloping the Congregation* says,

> Redevelopment is the resurrection journey. Like a bone marrow transplant or stem cell replacement, much of what seems intrinsic to the church will have to die. Redevelopment is an exodus. The congregation will have to leave many things behind to travel from captivity to the promised land. The journey is long. We have yet to see the immigration completed and the congregation settled into life in the land of ongoing adaptability in less than

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[7] Alice Mann, *Raising the Roof: The Pastoral-to-Program Size Transition* (Bethesda, MD: The Alban Institute Publication, 2001), 62.

> seven years. The cost is high. It takes everything a congregation has.[8]

Sellon sees it taking a long time to begin change. So how does one start? According to Mann, one starts with a group of like-minded people who will become the leadership for the movement. It is their job, through conversation, to change the minds of those who do not agree. This is usually done first by contacting the official leadership in the church and working to get them to come into a like-minded state about the need for outreach. This group may represent the easiest sell since they are the same people who see the financials and realize the need for a new infusion of income. These same people are some of the principal workers in the church and, therefore, see the need to bring new workers into the church to help sustain its current ministries.

"World-renowned change expert, John Kotter, is clear that developing a sense of urgency is the first step towards lasting change."[9] This is not for the faint of heart. Again it is a long journey as seen by the authors of this book.

> There are eight tasks or steps that are common to all. Desire to reach the destination quickly lures you to ignore or only superficially address those tasks. New programs that offer the promise of quick growth entice you. But your goal is not just an improvement of the present. Resuscitating your church is not enough. It needs to develop the ability to remain flexible and adaptive in a changing, shifting environment. Nothing less is the goal. But without a compelling sense of urgency, perseverance fades.[10]

For many of the inner city churches, the issue may be that they can no longer attract the people that economically and socially most resemble those who are still left in

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[8] Mark K. Sellon, Daniel P. Smith, and Gail F. Grossman, *Redeveloping the Congregation: A How To for Lasting Change* (Bethesda, MD: The Alban Institute Publication, 2002), xii.

[9] Ibid., 1.

[10] Ibid.

the church. Many inner city churches remember their "glory days" as Mann calls them. They cannot understand why people do not want to drive back into the heart of the city, from which they or their parents fled years before. The people who now surround the church are different from those still in the church. This difference may be economic or ethnic or social status. But the bottom line is that they will have to be convinced that they want and perhaps even need them. Suburban churches may have different problems that need to be addressed, but the time frame for changing the minds of the people in the church is lengthy according to Mann and Sellon.

Looking at "The Process Frame" in *Studying Congregations*, one can see how congregations get stuck and unable to change. They cite a new minister who comes during a controversial issue and wants to confront the issue with a meeting and debate. The new minister is told no by a lay leader, "That's not the way we fight in this church. Our way is to let things settle out and resolve themselves slowly."[11] This comes not from formal rules but the process is inferred and known by insiders. Such unofficial rules and understandings tend to block the ability of a congregation to be fluid and change. It is no wonder that ministers, especially those who move from church to church, have a hard time knowing how to lead the congregation through change.

The author of the book *Leading Causes of Life* says that there are some seventy churches in downtown Memphis, Tennessee, and of these only seven or eight are doing anything to reach those around them. The rest are not engaged in any kind of outreach in the neighborhoods that surround them. Many of these churches that are not engaged in the community are suffering due to a lack of attendance and growth.

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[11] Ammerman, Nancy T. et al., *Studying Congregations: A New Handbook* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1998), 15.

Why would churches that are in trouble, or soon will be, continue on as they always have? To attempt to answer this question, one needs to look at how churches start and why they die.

Thomas G. Brandy equates the church with the passenger pigeon. The passenger pigeons were preoccupied with family. When one considers how most churches begin, this makes a lot of sense. Most churches began with a nucleus of three to eight families who got together to form a church. This is best seen in the early agricultural societies of North America. These farming communities, comprised of multiple families, would band together to start a church. Most of these families were large, because the labor force for the farm came primarily from the children the family produced. Eventually mechanization took the place of human labor so the children moved off to the cities to find employment. Early in their lives, they had learned, as farmers, they depended on God for the harvest. This dependence carried into their lives in the city, and more churches were born.

The above brings one to a basic understanding of how most churches started and to see that the family unit is still strongly in place in most churches today. Families are closely knit units. Breaking into that close knit society may make one feel like they are trying to break into a closed society. Back to Bundy's pigeons, he says that being preoccupied with family "sounds wonderful." This preoccupation caused them to spend less time adapting to the environment and more time perpetuating the habits of the passenger pigeon among the young. Because they were unable to welcome unattached

new birds, the genetic pool became weaker and weaker, until they could no longer give birth to the young birds that they wanted to love so dearly."[12]

Bundy says that the reason churches are dying today is that they are relying on a wrong model of leadership. He articulates the problem saying, "Family churches value gregariousness, heritage, and homogeneity—and they nurture leaders who find personal satisfaction in prioritizing gregariousness, heritage, and homogeneity. Often these churches do not even recognize the vicious circle in which they are trapped."[13] This triad of characteristics has caused these churches to become so myopic that they are no longer cognizant of their changing community surroundings. To a greater or lesser degree, they may not even care. According to Bundy, their catch phrase may sound like "We are the righteous remnant." Or it may sound like, "Our way of life may be endangered, but that is only because our way of life is the only way to live."[14]

"Numerically static congregations in growing communities usually see themselves as open and welcoming. They feel successful if they replace the members that they lose to death, relocation, or discontent. But they are typically reluctant—or at best ambivalent—about expanding capacity in ways that would permit net growth."[15] The author of this document has used secret shoppers in his own context to see how people from outside the fellowship feel—how were they treated when they came to the church for the first time. The major questions are about how welcomed they felt and how ready

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[12] Thomas G. Bundy, *Moving Off the Map: A Field Guide to Changing the Congregation* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1998), 15-16.

[13] Ibid., 17.

[14] Ibid.

[15] Alice Mann, *Raising the Roof: The Pastoral-to-Program Size Transition* (Bethesda, MD: The Alban Institute Publication, 2001), 17.

the community of faith was to include a new person to their gathering. Unfortunately, the results have been less than encouraging. During a time set aside in the service to welcome each other, especially guests, they were either not greeted by anyone or only by those who invited them. Occasionally one or two people greeted them. This action confirms Bundy's assessment. Sadly those who visit without invitation often receive no greeting at all.

This lack of hospitality will be problematic to a church trying to reach out. Hospitality, or the lack thereof, can be seen as a spiritual problem. If one is following the example of Christ, he should think of others first. Until such a mindset is obtained, it will be necessary to remind the existing congregation of this duty. The author of this project, unaware of how the previous two years of ministry would fit into the project, saw how God led this pastor to spend those years preparing the project church for such a time. Even the Oklahoma Annual Conference of the United Methodist Church, under the direction of Bishop Robert E. Hayes, Jr., had adopted a strategic plan that incorporated much that this project church had already begun.

One place that Mann and Bundy may agree is how long it will take to affect change. Bundy says,

> Finally, even if the legitimacy and scope of systemic change is understood, and even if congregational readiness for change is achieved, leaders will have difficulty developing strategies to achieve transformation. Christendom leaders have all been trained to bring change through programmatic strategic planning. However, the world is changing so swiftly that, even in the business sector, programmatic strategic planning no longer works.[16]

[16] Ibid., 23.

Christendom needs to develop an ethos of immediacy. Without this change the church will continue to suffer loss.

Just attend a contemporary worship service if there is ever any doubt and look at those who are attending. The music of the 80s and 90s that most people consider being contemporary, current music, mostly attracts people who were engaged in listening to such music during that era of time. Today's youth and young people want to hear, for the most part, what is playing on Christian radio today, at least in this author's experience.

These elements, the triad cited above, might be the largest obstacle that one has to overcome if an established church is to grow. How a church overcomes these obstacles is beyond the scope of this document, but some avenues may be found herein. But it is central to the arguments of those who will oppose a program focused on building up the kingdom of God in their particular house of worship.

Not every church that wants to grow is doing so out of a sense of survival. Many churches want to grow because they believe in the Gospel directive to make disciples for Jesus Christ. These churches will obviously require less time getting the rank and file on board with a new project to reach people. Those who are reaching out, due to a sense of survival, will require more work and time getting the membership to accept this new mission. Survival is a major theme in why churches want to reach new people but it is not a reason that will touch many people. The only valid reason is to spread the Good News of Jesus Christ.

William Abraham, in his book *The Logic of Evangelism* says, "The problem with church growth is not a problem here or there that can be addressed and resolved by

'tinkering with isolated elements of the system.'"[17] He articulates that some people equate the problems as a "disease that is hard to identify . . . However, together they stubbornly refuse to disappear under scrutiny and the drastic remedies that have to be prescribed bear all the appearances of endangering the life of the patient."[18] Darrell Guder, in *Missional Church*, writes, "But the churches face a crisis of their own. They manifest an increasing disease with their heritage of a functional Christendom and forms of church life shaped by modern notions of voluntary association and rational organization."[19]

He goes on to write, "This is a time for a dramatically new vision. The current predicament of churches in North America requires more than a mere tinkering with long-assumed notions about the identity and mission of the church. Instead, as many knowledgeable observers have noted, there is a need for reinventing or rediscovering the church in this new kind of world."[20]

Bundy says, "Church transformation and the demands for such can be characterized in four ways. They are (1) Change must be systemic; (2) Change must be owned by the congregation; (3) Change must be concentrated; and (4) Change must be anchored in the experience of the congregation with Jesus."[21] He goes on to say that the key question for church transformation is: "What is it about our experience with Jesus

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[17] William J. Abraham, *The Logic of Evangelism* (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2002), 76.

[18] Ibid., 77.

[19] Darrell L. Guder, *Missional Church: A Vision of the Sending of the Church in North America* (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1998), 77.

[20] Ibid.

[21] Bundy, *Moving,* 20-21.

that this community cannot live without?"[22] For any church considering reaching out, this is a great question to start with before doing anything else.

Alice Mann says that it is paramount to gather a group of like-minded persons who are interested in reaching out and make this the starting group or point in church growth. This group may take the place of the leadership group that a new church start would form. This author would recommend that the same relational building found in a small group be advanced here. The time spent will help solidify the relationships and the informed focus or purpose for their existence. Here Abraham sees the danger of trying to make this just another program in the church. When one removes the true reasons for relationships and turn them into a program destined to fill the sanctuaries of our churches, they endanger the church itself.

> Unless we are very careful such delicate matters as friendship and love will be turned into one more utilitarian means or tool to increase the statistics of church membership. Before we know what is happening sacred human relationships will have lost their integrity and the distinctive character of Christian love will have been eroded by and evangelistic orientation that construes them not as ends in themselves but as means to an end.[23]

Since one knows that most churches were formed through family relationship and personal loving relationships, it is not hard to see how one might lose their way for the sake of church attendance. The only true evangelism is reaching people for Jesus Christ for the transformation of the world. This is a learned mindset. For many Christians the desire to evangelize is shrouded in a need to fulfill a perceived need in the church.

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[22] Ibid.

[23] Abraham, *Logic,* 77.

Evangelism, for the sake of increased attendance only, must be guarded against. Often, personal discipleship development must precede evangelism. We must be able to articulate what we believe before we can truly reach others with the Gospel of Jesus Christ.

John Wesley, the founder of Methodism, received from a friend and co-worker this advice when he doubted his faith. Peter Böhler told him, "Preach faith till you have it and then because have it, you will preach faith."[24] All people have room for a more personal relationship with God. Abraham is saying that as our faith and relationship with God becomes stronger, a person will evangelize their friends and acquaintances because of the love for God and each other that exist within them.

A new church start is about reaching new people with the Gospel. Forming a team to reach out into the desired area of a new church start is like any evangelistic effort, except that those reaching out have a purpose they can articulate. Part of the new church start is the formation of the launch team or leadership team. This team of dedicated people comes together for a season to help the church, but how long does a season last? Nelson Searcy, a successful church planter in New York City, says that for him the leadership/launch team of a new church start is temporary. He defines a launch team as, "A team of committed individuals who will assist you in preparing for and executing an effective launch. This is a team of people currently living in the area where your new church will meet—a team that you will build from scratch. The launch team is in existence only through the first weekly service."[25] While there are similarities between a

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[24] Albert C. Outler, *John Wesley* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1964), 17.

[25] Nelson Searcy and Kerrick Thomas, *Launch: Starting a New Church from Scratch* (Venture, CA: Regal Books, 2006), 142.

launch team and a team brought together for the purpose of revitalizing or growing a church, they differ in the time frame in which they will exist. A team in an existing church may continue long after the acceptance of a growth project and be used to consider how the church can continue on its current path or vision how new ministries may play a part in keeping the church plugged into the needs of the society around them.

This author spent more than thirty years in sales before answering the call to ministry. Many people may not think that salesmanship has much to do with building up a church but the truth is that it has much to do with it. When a person shares his personal witness with someone else, it is a form of selling. The one offering the testimony hopes that his or her personal experience will persuade the person being spoken with to see the need to accept what is offered and join him or her. This is selling at its best. A church that wants to grow needs to assess what they have to offer. They need to package it in a way that is appealing to the prospective audience. The prospective audience of the church is found in doing a contextual analysis of the community they wish to reach.

When one contrasts the time frame for an existing church to change their minds and how long it takes for a new church start to get off the ground, one can see why so many denominations are now putting their money and efforts into starting new churches as a way of turning around their declining membership. The normal time frame for a new church start to launch its regular weekly services is from six to eighteen months with twelve months being the target and average for most. During this time, several things have to happen.

The planting pastor must meet and gather a group of people together who are interested in starting a new church. They need to be like-minded in the kind of church

they want to start. There are as many different kinds, types, or ways of worshiping as there are planting pastors, since the church usually takes on the planting pastor's personality and theology. They will meet as a small group for the duration of the formation. These first individuals will become the leadership team for the church, at least for a while. Each member will have a purpose or job, like setup and teardown of the worship center if the church is using space that is used by others during the week; this is referred to as a nomadic church in the leadership manual for NCLI (New Church Leadership Institute, part of Path I of the United Methodist Church). Many church starts begin by renting space in a school for their Sunday services. These original members will also be the catalyst who invites people to become a part of this new and exciting church, usually starting with the people they know.

Enthusiasm is the driving force that builds a new church's membership. Generally, those who are drawn to this new church will be like-minded, and they will also invite their friends and acquaintances, causing a snowball effect as the number of guests grow.

Searcy, in his book *Launch*, sees the function of the launch team ending with the launch of the first service. Other church planters see this original team as the leadership team that will guide the new church for the first year as it grows. Jim Griffith and Bill Easum see a change in leadership too soon as a mistake. They say,

> It's been our experience that those who start with the project bring lots of energy to the launch but not necessarily the much needed strengths to organize and manage it in such a way as to keep it moving. In the early stages you need people who will do what you ask, show up on time, serve joyously, and don't expect anything from you. We remind planters all the time, 'You're the

> leader. You don't need more leaders right now; you need workers.'[26]

That doesn't mean that these persons on the leadership team are not leaders, but they are not the primary decision makers; only the planting pastor has that authority. It is the vision of the planting pastor that, in the beginning, drives the church forward.

Which author is correct? Much about planting and revitalizing has to do with context. What works well in one context may not work as well in another context. This may, in part, be due as much to the different visions of those pastors and their leadership teams as it has to do with methodology. This author has experienced this firsthand. Having traveled to Florida for a week-long assemblage of pastors for the United Methodist Church's School of Congregational Development Conference in 2008, part of the process that week included attending Sunday worship at one of several large growing churches. We also were to attend one evening worship service at a mid-week service where young people gathered with a band that played current and even original music. The large, growing church this pastor chose was in The Colonies, a retirement community that did not allow anyone under the age of eighteen to live in the community on a permanent basis. The church was quite large and boasted of several worship services, all of which were full. They were in the midst of trying to reach younger people and children, from a nearby community, as a way to bring variety and vitality into the church. While a few people who worked in The Colonies did attend and bring their children, they were so few in number that it is doubtful that they were missed when they were not there, at least by the majority.

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[26] Jim Griffith and Bill Easum, *Ten Common Mistakes Made by New Church Starts* (St. Louis: Chalice Press, 2008), 102.

Griffith and Easum address such a situation for those who are visioning. The church above had successfully planted and launched based on their context. A church trying to reach those who are not part of their context, such as the young people by the same church, will possibly find disappointment in their future. The example given in Griffith and Easum's book refers to a planter who tried to incorporate into his plant everything that he had ever imaged. They wrote, "Sam made a fatal mistake that many planters make. His love affair with his fantasy church blinded him to the realities of the mission field around him. His formula for success didn't match the needs of the mission field; he was unable to adapt."[27]

The vision for the church must match the context if it is to be successful. Who is it that the church is trying to reach? Does that demographic even exist in the area around the church or is the church depending on a "drive-in congregation" to be successful? These are pretty simple questions but necessary if success is to have a chance. George Barna says that what we know about the people we interact with informs our actions, "When we go to lunch with a college student, we probably do not wait for them to pick up the check because we know their budget is limited."[28] Likewise, trying to reach a population around a church that does not exist makes no sense. It also makes little sense to launch an effort trying to reach thirtysomethings at the expense of the older generation that has kept the church alive for the last few decades. *Reaching People under 40 while Keeping People over 60* informs this discussion, "Part of the challenge of reaching people under forty while keeping those over sixty is a generational issue because generations

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[27] Ibid., 22.

[28] George Barna, *Grow Your Church from the Outside, Understanding the Unchurched and How to Reach Them* (Ventura, CA: Regal Books, 2002), 39.

have different preferences for how they worship, learn, lead, relate, do ministry, and interact with one another."[29] Church planters are not exempt from these contextual considerations. Griffith and Easum say, "Planters often have such a love affair with being innovative and ideologically driven that they give little thought to the actual mission field and the key question, 'What's it going to take to reach these people?'"[30] Guder tells the reader that "Complex, modern society is a reality for everyone in North America."[31] But the complexity of modern society is not part of what the current church thinks about when they begin to decide how to reach out. Maybe that is why evangelism is so difficult for most churches. Guder goes on to say, "A missional ecclesiology challenges the church to be intentional about its unique social potential. Congregations should reflect the full social mix of the communities they serve, if they are truly contextual."[32] Nelson Searcy says:

> If we asked you, "Who are you trying to reach?" you would most likely respond, "Well, everyone, of course!" While it's true that you want to share the gospel with as many people as possible, you will need to develop a clear picture of the specific demographic your new church is targeting in order to effectively reach the greatest number of people. Diffused light has little impact, but focused light has the ability to cut through steel. Take time to focus so that you are able to reach the specific people God has called you to.[33]

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[29] Edward H. Hammett and James R. Pierce, *Reaching People under 40 While Keeping People over 60: Being Church for All Generations* (St. Louis: Chalice Press, 2007), 31.

[30] Griffith and Easum, *Common Mistakes,*.23.

[31] Guder, *Missional Church,* 20.

[32] Ibid., 70.

[33] Searcy and Thomas, *Launch,* 165.

He goes on to give five areas of focus: Findable, Outward-Oriented, Community-Based, Unreached, and Specific to help one find their focus population.[34]

Going into this project, the author had to look at the target audience to determine who would be and who would not be included. To target the poor people who live within the project area would not have been a good target for the context, at least at this time. For this project to have the opportunity to succeed, those from like social and economic backgrounds needed to be approached. Even then there was always a chance that, since the present congregation was not courted sufficiently due to time constraints, they might not be accepted. This did not happen and will be discussed in a later section. As Mann, Bundy, Ammerman, and others suggest for this or any other evangelistic endeavor to be successful, at least some time must be spent soliciting the support of the current congregation. It would be rare if everyone, in any given church, were to get on board with such a project, but with a little thought and advanced planning it should be possible to include most of the current congregation. Those not willing to actually go out and help in the neighborhoods might be enlisted to become the prayer team for this mission project. Others might be enlisted to support it by purchasing the ice cream, bowls, and spoons. However one incorporates the congregation, it is important to get as many people on board as possible. When people become engaged, as an active part of the mission project, the more vested they are in seeing it succeed.

A couple of other issues that need to be looked at are staffing and faith. Nelson Searcy, in his book *Launch,* speaks about the need to adequately staff for increase. If one's church is understaffed, he will not be able to sustain the level of service that new prospective members will expect. It is also important to have the right staff positions

[34] Ibid., 166.

filled. Searcy says that there are three critical areas of staffing that need to be looked at first.

Searcy, as a church planter, encourages the planting pastor to staff for needed first-year positions. He says that the positions needed would be the Lead Pastor, Worship Leader, and Children's Ministry Leader. These three areas of staffing are critical in the first year. It is the same for an existing church; it is critical that one has the staffing in place before new people are sought. It would be hard to start a new church without a lead pastor. It would be hard to start a new church without someone to lead the singing. And it would be foolish to begin a new church without a place for the children to go and learn. Yet many existing churches that want to grow lack the essentials for growth. An automotive repair shop that opens for business without any mechanics on staff will not last long. It is the same for the church. One cannot wait until after the people come to establish needed ministries to care for the congregation. The church that wants children must be staffed for children's ministry. Searcy says, "Remember, there are key staff members that you must have on board during the first year of your new church,"[35] and this author would add that the same is true for an existing church that wants to grow.

An existing church that wants to grow will need to look at staffing. Mann says that for small churches, 100-120 in attendance, they "will often be staffed by a full-time ordained minister, a half-time secretary, a part-time maintenance person or cleaning service, and a musician who is compensated for a day or two each week."[36] But growth

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[35] Searcy and Thomas, *Launch,* 98.

[36] Mann, *Raising the Roof,* 21.

requires adequate staffing to be effective. Mann says that going beyond the 150-person attendance level requires more staffing.

> At an average attendance of 150, a congregation that wants to support continued growth may add a half-time position on the program side (assisting the pastor or lay professional), increase the level of office support, and extend a custodian's hours for building maintenance and room setup. Having launched a children's choir or a new adult ensemble, the church may budget for an additional day of its musician's time. As attendance approaches 200, growth often cannot be sustained without (the equivalent of) at least two full time program staff (clergy or lay), full-time office support, and a half- to full-time custodian.[37]

She goes on to say that before growth takes place—staffing must be in place. At her conference, held at Canyon Camp Retreat Center for the Oklahoma United Methodist Church, she took the attendees through a process of evaluating the staff they had on staff and related it to their desire to grow. Many were unaware that the staffing they had in place would not, according to Mann, sustain additional growth. She told those attending, adequate staffing must precede growth, if growth is to be sustained. [38]

There are many facets to growing an existing congregation, as there are to starting a new one. The overlap of the two endeavors should give a congregation that wishes to grow a fresh avenue to pursue to make growth a reality. There are lessons to be learned from church planters that may help our existing churches remain viable for many years into the future.

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[37] Ibid.

[38] Mann, *Raising the Roof.*

CHAPTER THREE

HISTORICAL FOUNDATION

In the earliest of times, the Christian movement began in people's homes. A disciple would come into the area and preach the good news, often in the synagogue. The people who heard the Word would invite these itinerant preachers to their homes. They would gather together in a home and invite the people around them, their friends, and associates and study the Word of God.

There are several things that contributed to the spread of the early church. First and foremost was the *Pax Romana*. This is known as the Roman peace. It is possible that the spread of Christianity would have been unheard of had Jesus come even a half-century earlier. The *Pax Romana* brought infrastructure to the entire known world. The development of a road system allowed for not only the speedy movement of troops but also the transmission of news and commerce. This encouraged travel and social interaction between multiple nationalities of the empire. This peace and infrastructure fostered an unheard of quantity of letters and literature that were shared between the early Christians.

The Greek language also contributed to the spread of Christianity. The use of the Greek language was so widespread throughout the Mediterranean basin that it had become a common, almost universal, tongue. This enabled Christians from different parts

of the empire to be able to share the Good News with those who lived in areas that spoke different local languages.

Greek thought also contributed to a wide array of conceptions about God and the faith that was being spread. Much of Greek thought provided a pathway to articulate the faith in a deeper sense that had ever been possible in the past. "Both Plato and Aristotle provided impetus for this movement towards monotheism. The former gave as the highest of his Ideals the Idea of Goodness, which he identified with God; and this God was personal. He was the Demiurge, the one who imprinted on the flux of formless matter the ideas which we find copied in the world of appearance in which we live."[1]

Michael Green, in *Evangelism in the Early Church*, says, "Aristotle also inclined heavily towards monotheism . . . there is the prime mover, who, although he did not create the world (which is eternal), nevertheless forms it by thought."[2]

The Romans and the Greeks had a great impact in the effort of the early church spreading the gospel, yet their contribution was little in comparison to the avenue afforded by the Jewish faith. Among the Romans, the Jews were not popular, but they were influential. Many of the Jews had been released from servitude and gained Roman citizenship. Their Roman citizenship gave them many advantages and privileges. Maybe best of all, their citizenship allowed them the freedom to travel without hindrance.

The Jews traveled and, as they did, they took their worship of God with them, worshipping either in the synagogue or in open air meeting places. Worshiping in open-air places attracted many Greeks, who were interested in the Jewish community and their

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[1] Michael Green, *Evangelism in the Early Church* (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1970), 18-19.

[2] Ibid.

services. A large number of these Greeks became, at least partially, a part of the Jewish community.

"The sociological significance of the home played a great part in the fundamental culture of both Rome and the Israelite community. Sociologically speaking the early Christians could not have hit on a sounder basis. The work of Jeremiah among others has shown how fundamental to God's economy of salvation in Israel was the house."[3] God used over and over again the house as the foundational unit by which he gave covenant and by which he saved humanity. Therefore, it is only fitting that God would bring salvation to the masses through homes.

Eventually, churches were formed where many people could come together to hear the Word of God. While churches were being built, they were mostly found in the larger towns and cities. This only makes sense as the place of highest population density, so there were many more people who could help support the church. But the small house church did not go way.

Most of the world lived in small villages and on farms. This was an agrarian society, and an agrarian society depended on human power to sow and to reap. Early North America was no different; in fact, North America remained an agrarian society even after the advent of the Industrial Revolution. The majority of the towns in North America existed to support that agrarian society.

Where people gather, God will be found. These farmers depended heavily upon God for everything that they had—for the rain, the seed, and the harvest. Also, the townspeople depended upon the farmers for their livelihoods. So in these small towns, the people would gather together to pray and to praise God.

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[3] Ibid., 208-209.

The churches grew as the people had large families. The children would mature and take a spouse and they would have children, especially for farm families; the number of children that they would have was quite large because this was the labor force for the farm. As these children matured, they did not leave the area but would start their own farms most of the time.

It is easy to see how churches grew. A man and woman might have six or more children, and, when the children married, they would each have six or more children. For any given church, there would be several families that were the nucleus. Since families were traditionally strong, most all of the children and grandchildren would come to that church. This would continue for many generations, causing many of the churches to become quite large.

As the Industrial Revolution gained a foothold in North America, cities begin to grow, and young people begin to leave the farm for jobs in the city. This is in part due to the reduced need for a large labor force, with new equipment being produced and the lure of making more money in the factories. Steeped in tradition, these young people from the country still needed a place to worship God. Therefore they found churches in their cities, and they would join with other people. They were dependent upon them as skilled labor to work in their stores and factories, and they worshiped together.

These people who had given up their agrarian lifestyle no longer needed families that were large. In fact, more children meant more mouths to feed. But while family size became smaller, the influx of new people into the cities became the catalyst for most church growth.

Historically, churches have grown as the area around them developed and continued to grow. Many denominations, in an effort to capitalize on growing areas of population, have gone out and planted many small neighborhood churches to accommodate the people. Most of these churches remained small family nucleus-type churches. The families in the neighborhood would gather together to worship, pray and fellowship. These churches gave the people of the neighborhood not just a place to worship but also a place to belong. Most of these people found the neighborhood church to be the center of their spiritual and social life.

While church growth in most mainline denominations has come through the growth of families and by the invitation of friends and family, some church denominations have also grown out of adversity. Some denominations have grown through church splits. When church members could not get along, they would often split along political lines and some would leave the church and start a new church elsewhere in town. This is not the best way to start a new church, but it has worked for some denominations.

The United Methodist Church has tracked the attendance and membership of all their churches for an extended period of time. Looking back in time, one can see that there are areas of time when the church did not experience growth. In hindsight, one can look at what was going on in the denomination during its time of growth and decline that related to its effectiveness. There are many factors that spur growth over a small window of time. Factors such as poor economics, war, and times of prosperity brought people to church. Probably difficult times were more of a catalyst to bring people back to church than were the good times, but it all contributed to the growth of many churches.

Through statistics, we can see that the greatest growth in the history of the United Methodist Church coincided with the planting of new churches. The 1960s was the last such decade of explosive growth. The United Methodist Church was planting many new neighborhood churches as a way of reaching people where they lived. The 1960s were a time of prosperity that found many new housing additions being built. These additions filled in the countryside, and as they did a new church would be founded completing these quasi-communities.[4]

The history of the United Methodist Church shows the trends and patterns of membership growth, as it corresponds to the church-per-capita ratio through the centuries. It is interesting to go to the statistics of the church to see their history and to see what they should have learned. History is supposed to keep one from making the same mistakes over and over again. The problem is that people don't know their history, and they seldom take the opportunity to look at it.

The United Methodist Manual for New Church Development has a wealth of information in it that can help one see the need for reading history. It also gives a unique look at what the denomination needs to do to maintain and hopefully reverse the trend of membership loss that has been experienced over the last forty plus years.

In 1820, there was one congregation for every 875 people in the country. The Methodists and Baptists were the largest denominations with about 2,700 churches. By the beginning of the Civil War, the population had more than tripled to over 30 million people, and the number of churches had outpaced the population growth now numbering 54,000 by 1860; that is one congregation for every 600 people.

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[4] Rob Weber (lecture, School of Congregational Development, Core Seminar, Orlando, FL, 2008).

The church experienced phenomenal growth during this time, but what happened that caused this growth to cease? For the next 130 years, this number remained relatively unchanged. Starting new churches, communities of faith, was the impetus that drove the denominations during this time. They were interested more in reaching people than they were keeping the doors of their various churches open. Today most denominations struggle with keeping the doors open. The Christian denominations in the United States are actually closing more churches than they are starting year to year.

Starting new churches did not continue at a rate that it had, but the Methodist churches continued to flourish. There were 212,230 congregations in the year 1906, and, of those congregations, one-half of them were less than thirty years old. From 1899 to 1906, the population of the United States increased by 9 million and the number of new faith communities increased by 32,000. That is an increase of one new church for every 280 persons. Yet with all the success that denominations met by the late twentieth century, the growth of new faith communities had taken a sharp downturn.[5]

We are told by Lyle Schaller, "A more sobering picture develops when we observe the six predecessor denominations of today's United Methodist church. This group organized a combined total of 7,395 new congregations in the late 1880s, compared to 700 new churches in the late 1980s."[6]

Finding such great success between the Civil War and World War I, there must have been a reason for this shift away from new church development. Tracy, a gentleman engaged in retail sales, once said, "If a promotion is working, you need to ride it until it

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[5] Lyle E. Schaller, *44 Questions for Church Planters* (Nashville, Abingdon Press, 1991), 17.

[6] Ibid., 17-18.

dies."[7] This same gentleman lost sight of his own advice and canceled a promotion that he had successfully been running for almost three years. Most people, given a certain circumstance, grow wary of doing the same thing for prolonged periods of time even when they are successful. Is this what happened to the denominations while they continued to enjoy success after success in opening new congregations?

One can only speculate as to why and how these successful denominations left the path, where success had been found, for a different and less successful venue. Lyle Schaller points out that the church in America abandoned its first strategy of "forming hundreds of thousands of new churches" for the less successful strategy of "trying to increase the size of the average congregation."[8]

Schaller says the second strategy is problematic for two reasons:

> The first problem is the second law of thermodynamics which, when translated into institutional terms, states that sooner or later everything runs down. Thus the normal and predictable pattern is for congregations to gradually shrink in size.
>
> Second, new churches are more likely to reach more people and grow in size in long established parishes. Perhaps the simplest explanation of this pattern is that new congregations are organized around evangelism and reaching people not actively involved in the life of any worshipping community. By contrast powerful internal institutional pressures tend to encourage long established churches to allocate most of their resources to the care of members."[9]

The United Methodist Church, as a denomination, loses between 65,000 and 80,000 members each year. This equates to about 1,470 persons per week or the equivalent of six average churches of 250 members. After years of decline, the

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[7] Ron Perceful, *A Personal Conversation* (Oklahoma City, 1989).

[8] Schaller, *44 Questions*, 21.

[9] Ibid., 23.

denomination has awakened to the fact that allocating its resources in the maintenance and retention of existing members is a failed system. Not only is this a failed system, but also it is also non-biblical in its approach to the world. This failure is most easily seen when we focus on the success that the denomination is having outside of the United States where the church is focused on making new disciples for Jesus Christ instead of the maintenance and growth of existing churches.[10]

There are many other signs that point to the error of the denominational thinking of the past. Statistically, the denominations may look healthy but this in part is due to the skewed averages when one takes into consideration the megachurches that exist. While average church size is approximately 231 members, the majority of denominational churches are much smaller than this number. Half of all United Methodist churches have a membership of 113 or less with an average attendance of 53 or less persons.[11]

Other signs of denominational failure can be seen in the aging population in the United Methodist Church where the ratio of young adults to senior adults has reached an average of one to six. The number of children in church is a full fifty percent less than the national per-capita average. While only four in ten United Methodist worshipers have children living at home, sixty-five percent of American families have children residing at home.[12]

These are just some of the signs that the church today must change if it is to continue to exist. As a denomination, it is imperative that the church adopts the biblical

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[10] Richard Wilke, *Signs and Wonders* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1989), 16.

[11] The Office of Research and Planning of the General Council on Ministries, *Conference Data Comparisons: 1999-2000,* Background Data for Mission, 14, no. 1, (January 2002): 1.

[12] The Office of Research and Planning of the General Council on Ministries, *Do You Know Who Attends United Methodist Churches?* (Dayton, OH: The Office of Research and Planning), 11.

mandate to make disciples for Jesus Christ, not the maintenance of members or facilities, as its primary mission. While the United Methodist Church has actually embraced this mission in print, it must now more than ever embrace it by action. This will only be accomplished through the sweat and toil of starting new communities of faith unless the church begins to reach out to those around them. Starting new churches alone will not stem the tide of decline. The refocusing of existing churches, with an outward evangelistic neighborhood thrust that will stand alongside new churches starts, as they push together to birth more and more communities of faith, will rescue today's church.

Biblical Foundation

The people who call themselves Christian know that it is the desire of God that they shall "Go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything I (Jesus) have commanded you."[13] God, through Jesus Christ, gives the church a commission to reach out to others. A commission can also be thought of as a command. The commission given in this case is to take charge and do the will of God. God does not desire only certain peoples but tells us, in the above passage, that we are to reach all the peoples of the earth. We can also infer this from other text found in scripture.

"In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth . . . He created them male and female . . . You can eat from any tree in the garden but not the tree in the center of the garden." This paraphrase tells us that God created humanity and if God created humanity then it must have been for a purpose. God tells Adam, the first man, and Eve,

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[13] Matthew 28:19-20 (NIV).

the first woman, "To be fruitful and increase in number; fill the earth and subdue it." Therefore God's plan is for humanity to spread throughout the world.

A statement made by Professor Danna Nolan Fewell, in an introduction to Old Testament class at the Oklahoma Graduate Theological Program, was that Eve knew that it was God's plan that they should leave the Garden of Eden and therefore only accelerated God's plan.[14] Regardless of the actions of humanity, God had and still has a plan for the existence of the people of earth. That purpose is that "I (God) will be your God and you will be my people."[15] God intended for all of humanity to accept the gracious call to relationship made, but due to our stubbornness or some other innate reason, not all of humanity has responded to this most generous offer in the affirmative.

God had a purpose for Israel and that was to spread the word about this gracious God to the entire world. Israel did not conform to the will of God, in this matter, and instead turned inward only looking towards the interest of the nation, the interest of people like themselves. *Focus On The Family* produced a series of video Bible studies entitled *That The World May Know.*[16] In Volume One, the first video segment is named *Standing at the Crossroads.* Host Ray Vander Laan, in this segment, discusses the purpose of God for Israel as they take over the Promised Land and how they failed to fulfill the purpose and intent of God.

The location of Gibeon, in the mountains on the Jericho Road, is a place where maximum influence could have been interjected in the world's culture. This city was at a

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[14] Danna Nolan Fewell (lecture, Introduction to Old Testament, Oklahoma City: OK, Oklahoma City University, 1999).

[15] Ezekiel 36:28 (NIV).

[16] Ray Vander Laan, *That the World May Know,* VHS (Zondervan Publishing House, 1998).

crossroads for trade between the sea and the countries to the east. This city stood like a gate in the only pass through the mountains that travelers had to take to get either to the east from the western coast line or the reverse. The Israelites had been given by God the land where the Canaanites lived, and they were to drive them out of the area and this pass.

History shows that this did not happen, but if they had rooted out the Canaanites, they would have controlled this important crossroads, perhaps the most influential piece of land for that day and time. Had they taken control of this area they would have had the ultimate ability to influence the religious life of all people in the known world as they shared the God of the universe with those whom they came into contact. In turn, these people would continue to share what they had heard with those whom they, in turn, came into contact.

This is the purpose for which Israel had been chosen by God, for it is said that the LORD had said to Abram, "Leave your country, your people and your father's household and go to the land I will show you. I will make you into a great nation and I will bless you; I will make your name great, and you will be a blessing. I will bless those who bless you, and whoever curses you I will curse; and all peoples on earth will be blessed through you."[17] Israel, being in this advantageous position, would have shared God with the many people the caravans would have brought their way. And these were not just any people. The people they would have encountered would have been some of the most influential people in the world because they were the merchants, people of wealth and means.

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[17] Genesis 12:1-3 (NIV).

Since Israel did not fulfill the purpose that God had intended for them, another solution was needed. The world did know of God through Israel but not to the extent that God wanted or desired. The Israelites went into battle again and again, and they made a name for themselves. More importantly, they introduced the power of God to the rest of the known world. However, knowing about God and knowing God is not one and the same thing.

Knowing that there is a powerful God out there should make others want to find this God and follow, but this did not happen for Israel. So, what was it that kept the people from following God? We know that some did, and they were accepted as part of this people. Yet some who were exposed to the religion of Israel did not make the same choice. In fact most people did not.

Israel did not always follow God in a manner that would make someone want to be a follower. This is not unlike all many other religious people. Scripture is full of stories about how Israel was unfaithful over and over again. A good percentage of the Bible is devoted to the prophets, and theirs is not a story about how faithful the people were.

The prophets were sent to call the people back into obedience to God. They, the people, had followed the gods of other cultures. Why they followed other gods is not clear, but one could speculate that they were no different than the people of today. Isaiah 29:13 says, "These people come near to me with their mouth and honor me with their lips, but their hearts are far from me. Their worship of me is made up only of rules taught by men."[18]

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[18] Isaiah 29:13 (NIV).

Matthew Henry's *Concise Commentary on the Bible* says, "The security of sinners in sinful ways, is cause for lamentation and wonder . . . To worship God, is to approach him. And if the heart be full of his love and fear, out of the abundance of it the mouth will speak; but there are many whose religion is lip-labour only."[19] So the people of Israel were caught up in obeying the rules of religion, but they did not trust their hearts to God.

Today people have the same problem. People give lip service to God when it fits their purpose or to impress someone, but most people do not, like the people of Israel, have a true relationship with God. If the people of Israel honestly believed and trusted God, they would have wanted more than a casual relationship with God. They would have lived their lives for God, and God would not have just become a symbol of who they were as a people. Most all of the people of that day were identifiable by the clothes they wore and the customs that they kept. The latter of these two was the most concrete of the outward symbols that people would notice. The desire to follow God is diminished when those who claim God as theirs do not provide a witness that corresponds with what they say either by word or by action.

It is evident from Scripture in the Old Testament that God wanted more from the people than just to be the figure head or symbol for their ethnic identification. It is also fairly obvious that a people, who do not pattern themselves after God, makes little sense.

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[19] Matthew Henry, *Matthew Henry's Concise Commentary on the Bible*, Isaiah 29:9-16, http://mhc.biblecommenter.com/isaiah/29.htm. .

Yet the people of Israel continued to go their own way until they got to a place in their collective lives that they needed divine help.

God wanted a people who would love and follow. God wanted a people that pointed to God in their everyday lives, and through such lives they would influence a world by introducing God to every person that they met. While that is what God wanted, that is not what God got. So, why did God not just make the people love God with their whole heart, mind, soul, and strength? Because God does not make people love or not love, therefore God gave humanity free will, which was evident even in the Garden of Eden when the first humans decided to disobey. God gives all people the freedom to choose, and it would not truly be love if one had no choice. It is only love when one chooses and when they act upon it in response to something.

This is where the Old Testament Bible leaves the people of Israel, dispersed throughout the world longing to be together again as a unified people. God saw this and again had great mercy upon them. God once again would reach out to these people in love. Therefore God, in the ultimate act of love, sent God's only Son to grace this earth with his divine presence and with a message of forgiveness and grace for all who would accept it.

Again the people of Israel did not embrace this generous act of love and mercy. Jesus, during his ministry, crisscrossed the land of Israel with the Good News that God had sent him to deliver. Again and again Jesus drew large crowds but they heard mostly with their ears and not their hearts. The religious leaders of the time not only rejected the message but also rejected the messenger. Luke 4:29 tells us that Jesus' words so infuriated the leaders of the synagogue after his reading of the scroll of the prophet

Isaiah, when he said, "Today this scripture is fulfilled in your hearing."[20] Scripture then tells us that they drove him out of town to the brow of a cliff and intended to throw him off.

Jesus continued to draw crowds everywhere he went. Many came for the healing that he offered, others came for the food he provided, but some came to hear the words that he brought. These people were looking for the Messiah that was spoken of in scripture, and in the harsh day of Roman rule Jesus brought the people hope. Yet most of the people got what they came for and then departed. Each time he spoke, a small amount of people would stay and joined the group of disciples. Their numbers grew slowly but surely.

Jesus had come for the people of Israel, to gather them for a much grander purpose. The people, for the most part, rejected him as they had the prophets of old. At one point, he even told them he had come for their sake; he had come to heal them and through this action he surely saw the nation being healed.

During his journeys, he had encounters with Gentiles, people who were not of Jewish decent, and tried not to be of help to them. Why he did this, we do not know, but what he found were people of great faith who believed in him and were even willing to go and share what they saw and heard with others.

One such case happened as Jesus was going through Samaria, where he stopped for water as the disciples went to town for food. This is the story of Jesus and the Samaritan Woman.[21] The Jews did not mix with Samaritans in that time, so Jesus' willingness to speak to her was a shock. He asked her for a drink and then he told her

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[20] Luke 4:21 (NIV).

[21] John 4:4-42 (NIV).

about living water, the Holy Spirit, that he had to offer; this living water would prevent her from thirsting again. He told her about her life, and she saw him as a prophet.

Jesus refuted the worship that the Samaritan people practiced on the mountain and the practice of the Jews as well and told her that "a time is coming and has now come when the true worshipers will worship the Father in spirit and truth, for they are the kind of worshipers the Father seeks."[22] The woman professed that she knows that the Messiah is coming and understands that he will explain everything when he arrives. Jesus then divulged to her that he is the Christ. The woman upon hearing wisps away to tell the people of the village what she has encountered.

Analyzing John 3:11-4:42, Reverend Raymond Brown sheds light on several important points on the story of "The Woman at the Well." He says that the Samaritan woman "serve(s) as a spokesperson for a particular type of faith-encounter with Jesus."[23] This reference is about how one comes to faith, despite the many obstacles in her life. Brown shows how Jesus circumvents the obstacles by laying out a physical desire for this "living water" that he offers. The woman was most likely an outcast in her community, and that is why she was there, at the well, in the heat of the day instead of coming in the evening with the other women, when it was cool. The thought of not having to come to the well to draw water anymore was probably attractive to her also.

Brown moves on to explain that the woman's understanding of living water was not in context with the message given her by Jesus, but she was not alone in her lack of understanding. The disciples had been with Jesus, and they still did not understand what

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[22] John 4:23 (NIV).

[23] Raymond E. Brown, *An Introduction to the New Testament* (New York: Doubleday, 1997), 342-343.

he meant when he spoke of food they did not know about. Yet even in her lack of understanding, she came to a revelation when she said, "Could this be the Messiah?"[24]

She asked for affirmation that her revelation is true and she found it when, according to Brown, "The Samaritans from the village who come to believe when they encounter Jesus. Their words to her, 'No longer is our faith dependent on your story, for we have heard for ourselves.'"[25]

How wonderful it would be if all the people of the world could see the gift of grace and love offered, but again not even all who see or hear it will accept it. The Bible tells us that Jesus came to the region of Gerasenes by boat and when he exited the boat he met "a man with an evil spirit [who] came from the tombs to meet him."[26] Jesus had pity on the man and drove out the demons, for there were many and sent them into a herd of pigs. The pigs ran off a cliff and are killed and seeing this the townspeople "pleaded with Jesus to leave their region."[27]

Even today people are so caught up in the value of their possessions that they fail to see the greater value of people. If all of God's people, not just those who claim to be Christians, valued life more than things, then the world would be a much grander place to live. Since that is not the case, it is our job as Christians to bring the Good News to those outside of the church. For this is why Jesus gave us the commandment, "Go therefore and

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[24] John 4:29b (NIV).

[25] Brown, *Introduction*, 343.

[26] Mark 5:2 (NIV).

[27] Mark 5:17 (NIV).

make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you."[28]

Theological Foundation

Christians know that the Bible clearly shows that God has a plan for the Body of Christ. Genesis 1:28 tells of God saying to Adam, "Be fruitful and multiply and replenish the earth, and subdue it; and have dominion over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the air and over every living thing that moves upon the earth."[29] Was God, in this passage, only speaking of the replication of humanity and the subsequent labor that was to be put forth until the ground gave up its harvest? While God may have been calling humanity to physically subdue the earth, one could also make the inference that this was also a call to subdue the hearts of people. Genesis 3:15 shows God reaching out to Adam and Eve. Adam and Eve were sinners, yet God gave them "the promise of the one who will bruise the serpent's head, lifting the curse."[30]

Humanity is called to something greater than self. The Bible tells that humanity was created in the image of God, and if that is the case, humanity is to act like the one who created them. "For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son that whoever believes in him should not perish but have life everlasting."[31] Those who call themselves Christians must look towards God and seek that greater good that they have

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[28] Matthew 28:19-20 (NRSV).

[29] Genesis 1:28 (NRSV).

[30] Genesis 3:15 (NRSV).

[31] John 3:16 (NIV).

been called to; it is humanity's task to find out what that calling happens to be. At an address to the incoming students at Perkins School of Theology, somewhere in the mid-1980s, Dr. Charles Wood asked, "Why should you want to become theologians? What does theology have to do with leadership in the church? … Christian theology, as I [Dr. Wood] understand it—and, though I don' t claim to speak for my colleagues, I think this is a fairly representative understanding—is a critical inquiry into the validity of Christian witness."[32] He went on to say that it examines the life and message of the church and judges whether or not "they purport to be, namely, authentic, true, and fitting representations of the gospel of Jesus Christ."[33]

God may be calling all those who profess the Christ as Savior to be prophets in an increasingly tumultuous world. Every Christian as a prophet brings evangelism into a new light for most people and most theologians. Dr. William J. Abraham, the Albert Cook Outler Professor of Wesley Studies, Perkins School of Theology, Southern Methodist University, Dallas, Texas, says that evangelism must be taken radically serious as a topic of theological inquiry. "I consider it nothing short of a disaster that evangelism has been relegated to the fringes of modern critical theology."[34]

Abraham goes on for pages, in his book *The Logic of Evangelism*, describing various works on evangelism that have been published since the 1950s and tells of conferences on evangelism that he terms "polemical and ecclesiastical rather than critical

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[32] Charles M. Wood, *Vision and Development*: *An Orientation in Theological Study* (Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1985), as noted in *An Invitation to Theological Study* (Valley Forge, PA: Trinity Press International, 1994), 4.

[34] William J. Abraham, *The Logic of Evangelism* (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Company), 1-2.

and academic."[35] Yet, where is the praxis of evangelism found today? God's people are called to be prophets, heralds of God's saving grace, and they have still not heard the cry of the lost and the least. A prophet of old could not do anything but follow God's calling on his life and while that call was uncomfortable he did God's bidding. Today, the prophet remains mostly silent, sitting in a pew one hour a week and disappears into the world for the rest of the week. Where are the people who answer God's call to exercise their tongues on God's behalf? They are not, for the most part, the saints of today's church; they are instead the newcomers in today's churches. They are the people who are still on fire for God and have that burning desire to share God's grace with a hurting world.

What makes or allows new believers, in today's church, to be so vocal and yet seems to stifle long time members of the same affiliation? The answer may be rooted in the very Gospel that all members of the Body of Christ profess. Reaching new people for the Gospel of Jesus Christ must begin with the Good News. New people to the Christian faith have a living Gospel that infects their every waking moment. God is so alive and is working in their lives in such ways that they have no choice but to tell, to share it with others.

Conation is a term whose meaning is deeply seated in action. Conation is a more holistic realization of being; it is not a single activity, but it is the agency of one's knowing, love, and desires/action. It is the conation of new believers that makes them want to tell what they know. Much like being in love, it is an overwhelming feeling that must be expressed, and the more one expresses it the more that feeling becomes ingrained in who that person professes to be.

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[35] Ibid., 4.

Dr. Abraham says, "Whatever evangelism may be, it is at least intimately related to the gospel of the reign of God that was inaugurated in the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus of Nazareth. Any vision of evangelism that ignores the kingdom of God, or relegates it to a position of secondary importance, or fails to wrestle thoroughly with its content is destined at the outset to fail."[36]

As prophet, every Christian should evangelize at every opportunity. It is God's will that all might be saved. So what examples do we have of God's, albeit through humans, evangelizing and where do we dare to dream that it will take us? Looking to the past at Methodism, one can see where evangelizing might lead. The first Methodists, John and Charles Wesley, along with some friends at Oxford, sought a life of holiness. "From at least 1725 until the end of his days, Wesley was committed to the realization of holiness of life. Despite all vicissitudes of formulation and expression, this was the aim of his life, the organizing center of his thought, the spring of all action, his one abiding project."[37] This life of holiness directed their lives spiritually and economically. The holiness project, as it was termed in early Methodism, found that even though other aspects of the project changed through time, the idea of holiness remained constant.

Wesley proclaimed grace by faith. It is in this grace and through this grace that sanctification rightly understood is found. Therefore, "Holiness is no longer merely an outward correspondence to an external law. It is a glad and peaceful (not alienated) correspondence to the same 'law' now internalized."[38] Wesley's theology of soteriology

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[36] Ibid., 17.

[37] Theodore W. Jennings, *Good News to the* Poor: *John Wesley's Evangelical Economics* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1990), 140.

[38] Ibid.

fits nicely with Dr. Abraham's theology of evangelism; both believed that evangelism must begin with the Gospel of Jesus Christ. The call to holiness that each believer receives allows each prophet to exchange their present circumstance for a different location, just as Wesley exchanged Oxford for the fields, streets, and marketplaces from which he preached.

Wesley's holiness project can today still be unleashed into the world. Grace is available to all, not just the scholar or priest but everyone. "But note that this grace is the grace that makes us really and effectively holy. The good news is that we can become holy, not that we have been made exempt from holiness. But holiness is transformed from an elitist to a populist project by the power of grace."[39]

There is a problem with grace that is misunderstood by many people. It is a problem of perceived value, cheap grace. "Cheap grace" is a term used by Dietrich Bonheoffer to explain the loss of or the emptiness of grace's efficacy. Bonheoffer's cheap grace referred to "a residue of nominalism or of a justification that is merely juridical, the result is a grace that changes nothing, or at least nothing visible."

God's grace is given so simply and purely that it is hard for some people to truly comprehend. It is much like the story of Naaman in 2 Kings 5:1-19. Naaman had contracted leprosy. He wanted to be cured and is told to go and wash seven times in the river. Naaman is the commander of the Army of the King of Aram. Here is a man who is of great influence, so much so that the king listens to him. Naaman goes from his country to see the king of Israel. But the king of Israel cannot help him. The king of Israel sends him to see Elisha the Prophet. When he arrives, Elisha does not even come out of his

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[39] Ibid., 141.

house to talk to him. He just sends him to wash in the river seven times. Naaman is outraged. He begins to validate the rivers where he is from and says to those around him that they are better than this river in this foreign land. Then in verse thirteen, it is written, "Naaman's servants went to him and said, 'My father, if the prophet had told you to do some great thing, would you not have done it? How much more, then, when he tells you, Wash and be cleansed!'" So he went down and dipped himself in the Jordan seven times, as the man of God had told him, and his flesh was restored and became clean like that of a young boy."[40] The instructions were too simple. He did not understand the power of God and the place of faith in his healing. To just profess Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior and believe the promises of God is also too simple for many people. They do not see or understand what they have professed to the degree that God accepts it.

This is not the kind of grace that Wesley talked about, and it is not the sort of Gospel that Abraham sets forth. For Wesley, grace really worked. It made a difference in the lives of those whom it filled. For Abraham, it could be said that the Gospel to which he is speaking is also not a dead Gospel but a living Gospel that calls believers to action. It is because of this infused grace and living Gospel that today's prophets are being called to fulfill the work of God in the world.

This is a call to all believers, the entirety of the Body of Christ, so where have the saints gone wrong? The saints have forsaken their first love. Just as John is told in Revelation about the church at Ephesus:

> To the angel of the church in Ephesus write: . . . I know your deeds, your hard work and your perseverance. I know that you cannot tolerate wicked men, that you have tested those who claim to be apostles but are not, and have found them false. You have

[40] 2 Kings 5:13-14 (NIV).

> persevered and have endured hardships for my name, and have not grown weary. Yet I hold this against you: You have forsaken your first love. Remember the height from which you have fallen! Repent and do the things you did at first.[41]

This is to say that those saints have become complacent in their faith. They still believe and want others to be saved, but many believe that the job belongs to others, usually those who are younger in age. Those who are established in the church of younger age are busy and distracted by raising children, their careers, and personal interests.

The Body of Christ, the church, is always just one generation away from not existing. If each successive generation does not do their part to bring new life into the church, then within a generation or two the church will cease to exist. New Christians still have the fire and enthusiasm to reach out and share the reason they have for hope in a hurting world. They are not yet jaded by the maintenance mentality of more mature members. Therefore, if the church of Jesus Christ is to exist and to grow, it is imperative that an infusion of new converts graces the doors of our churches. The alternative is to start new churches and allow those who have been long established to die if they do not catch God's vision anew.

Theoretical Foundation

What does it mean to be the Body of Christ? That question has many answers. To be the Body of Christ means to come together and worship, to praise God. To be the Body of Christ means to love and care for others. To be the Body of Christ means one will love God with all their heart, strength, and mind. It has been said that the church is

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[41] Revelation 2:1-5 (NIV).

the only club or organization that wholly exists for those who are not yet members. If being the Body of Christ, the church, means that believers exist for those who have not yet become members, then how shall non-believers come to know who we are, where we are, and how shall they find out about the love of Christ they profess?

There is a problem in the church today. While this problem does not exist in every member of the Body of Christ, by and large it exists for the majority of the churches members. While the Body of Christ works hard to maintain what God has given them, they have "forsaken their first love." Many Christians, whether they grew up in the church or not, at some point in their lives truly knew God as their first love. To know God as their first love was to parallel any love relationship, outside of a parental love, that they had ever known. When one is in love, the only thing they can think about is the one with whom they are in love. That person becomes paramount in their life and the entire world begins to be woven all around that person.

Such is it with God. When a person first finds God in his life and comes to that realization of what God has done for them, to love and serve God becomes the most important thing in their lives. It must be acknowledged here that some people simply grew up in the faith and have therefore always just served God out of loyalty or duty. For these people, there may be no such point in time where they would say that their hearts were on fire for God. This in itself becomes problematic for the church. For without fire, how does one relate to God other than on an intellectual level?

Intellectually, one can know God but that is not the same as experiencing God on a personal level. When a person comes to know the Lord Jesus Christ as their personal Savior, then that person, through this personal experience, develops a passion that must

be expressed. It is this passion, this fire, which becomes the beacon of light to which many are drawn. But without passion, without fire, what happens to the Body of Christ?

Without passion, faith becomes internalized and personal. The faith that is internalized and personal does not reach out to a hurting world. A faith that is internalized and personal is not willing to reach out to a hurting world, and it becomes a faith that exists in maintenance mode. The Body of Christ that finds itself in maintenance mode becomes a church that has turned inward; its focus is no longer on the external but only the maintenance of self and the collective acquisitions of the Body. A church that is in maintenance mode is all about taking care of the building and its furnishings. To care for the building and furnishings is not a bad thing, because one should be faithful about taking care of what God has given them, yet not to the exclusion of being who God called them to be.

So, who has God called the Body of Christ to be? God has called the Body of Christ to be prophets, cheerleaders (evangelists), and shepherds. The question is how does one remove the apathy that has blinded the Body of Christ to its true purpose and get it back on track? For many members of the Body of Christ, they grew up always being a member of the church. They grew up with the expectation that nothing was required of them except to worship God, casually read the Bible and maybe to be charitable occasionally. The DNA of the church has become so watered down that there are no longer exacting expectations of what it means to be the Body of Christ. This expectation-less existence has corrupted the DNA of the church and made it unhealthy.

When the DNA of anything is unhealthy, the continued replication only continues to break down what was already unhealthy. A new person come into such churches alive

and on fire for God, and it does not take long for the Body of Christ to put that fire out. Apathy and an inward focus tend to suck all the oxygen out of a room, making it impossible for any fire to continue. This is the catalyst that the church has produced and it seems to be, at least until recently, too blind to see. As congregations begin to age, many have started coming to the realization that they must increase the number of people participating in the church if the church is to survive.

While this revelation is late in coming for a lot of churches, it is not too late. But this delayed reaction to the inevitable is to find most of our churches in neighborhoods that no longer fit the personality and a profile of its membership. Many, if not most, of the churches that have found themselves in this situation have continued to neglect the people that form the neighborhoods that surround their most beloved church. When queried as to why they did not reach out to the neighborhoods, there are a variety of answers: these people do not have any money how can they help, the people living around the church are much different than its membership, or everybody in the neighborhood is now of a different ethnic race and we do not speak their language. There are many more excuses, yes excuses, for not reaching out to the people that live around the church.

As quoted in the theological foundation, Dr. Abraham says, "Whatever evangelism may be, it is at least intimately related to the gospel of the reign of God that was inaugurated in the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus of Nazareth. Any vision of evangelism that ignores the kingdom of God, or relegates it to a position of secondary importance, or fails to wrestle thoroughly with its content is destined at the outset to

fail."[42] Obviously, the above excuses do not jive with the rationale of who Christians are supposed to be. The solution to the problem of declining numbers and church closures today may be as simple as understanding the gospel of Jesus Christ.

Statistically, it is far easier to go out and bring new people into the church that it is to get members who have ceased to come back in the church. Maybe that is because the church has not done a good job of teaching the gospel and implementing it in and through the lives of its members. Many churches have begun revitalization movements that have reached out into the suburbs to try to attract people that are more self-identifiable, people that "look like us." This has worked for some churches, but the majority have found that the vitality of the congregation was not strong enough to sustain such growth over the long haul.

Historically, one can look back and see the difference that starting new churches made. There are many reasons why starting a new church can reach people more easily than trying to rejuvenate an existing congregation. A new church is generally located in an area of growth. Most of the people in the area of a new church have the same social and economic commonalities and therefore find similarities to be inviting. For existing churches, the differing economies of life become a stumbling block for new persons entering the door. Some churches have tried to overcome the stumbling blocks by educating the congregations in ways of becoming more effective through a deepening sense of who they have been called to be as the Body of Christ.

Danna Glover and Claudia Lavy offer a methodology of understanding of how one can deepen their congregation's sense of calling and effectiveness. Their methodology is based upon one's understanding of where they are in their Christian walk.

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[42] Abraham, *Logic*, 17.

One cannot begin the process of becoming a true disciple until they understands where they are in the process. Discipleship is a process, not a destination. Paul spoke of how he fed the people spiritual milk because they were not mature enough for meat. Using the metaphor of a beach and ocean, they map out the different stages that disciples go through as they mature.

The first stage of their metaphor has the beach representing the world. This first stage is relegated to only those persons who do not have or have not had a relationship with a church in the past or anytime relative to the present. The one thing that they seem to have in common is the "resist(ance) to spiritual development that holds potential value for them."[43] The aforementioned group is referred to as the unchurched. When asked in workshops throughout the United States what they think about "church," what runs through their mind as they drive by a church on Sunday morning? Some of the answers are confusing, considering that many of the unchurched went to church at some point in their lives. Answers like, "Why should I go there? It's full of hypocrites," or "What's in it for me?" And questions like, "What interest would I possibly have in church?" or "Would anyone there accept me?"[44]

The aforementioned questions may seem out of place when talking about the church, but, for many within this category, these questions represent an honest search for the truth and according to the authors, "They have good reason to hesitate when it comes to seeking truth through the church."[45] The next stage is dependent upon those persons

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[43] Dan Glover and Claudia Lavy, *Deepening Your Effectiveness; Restructuring the Local Church for Life Transformation* (Nashville: Discipleship Resources, 2006), 14.

[44] Ibid., 15.

[45] Ibid., 16.

living in the world finding some commonality with those in the church and deciding to test the waters. Each stage of discipleship is represented by a deepening of one's faith commitment, as depicted by the disciples moving off of the beach to the shoreline, into the waves, and finally becoming fully committed as they swim in water that is over their heads.

Each stage takes time to develop; therefore, it is a process not a destination. George Barna, through his research, has come to many of the same conclusions about the unchurched as Glover and Lavy. Barna is of the belief that if the church truly looked like the church of Acts 2, where people enjoyed serving each other, took care of each other's physical, emotional, and spiritual needs, and cared more for others than for their material possessions or image, he says, "I am convinced that if the typical unchurched person were invited to get involved with such a collection of believers-people engaged in the kind of life described in these few verses they would jump at the opportunity."[46]

The church today has a perceived value problem. If the unchurched are to be reached, then the problem of value must be addressed. Not all churches or religious affiliations have a value problem. There are some religious leaders whose value is above reproach, even though these persons are not personally known. People such as Mother Teresa and Billy Graham hold such esteem in the hearts of the churched and the unchurched alike. Persons such as these fully live out a life of value that makes a difference in the lives of others. When one considers that many in the church talk the faith but do not live it out, and others do not even talk the talk, it is easy to understand why today's church has a perceived value problem. Barna says,

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[46] Barna, *Grow Your Church*, 15.

> Many people name Jesus as their Savior, but relatively few have lives that consistently demonstrate he is truly Lord of their hearts, minds, and souls. Perhaps before we invite other people to take part in the things of God, we should commit ourselves to experience fully all that is available to us through Jesus. When that happens, we will not have to worry too much about attracting and assimilating others into the church. When God becomes the true priority to our lives and when we imitate the heart of Christ and live in the power of the indwelling Spirit, what we represent will be irresistible."[47]

George Barna and Dr. William Abraham both agree that if the church is going to survive, it must change, and that change must begin with the Gospel. But can and will the "frozen chosen" change for the sake of the Gospel? Barna's research indicates that most Americans consider themselves Christians, either Protestant or Roman Catholic, but says that, "The moral and philosophical ambiguities that have reshaped our culture in recent years have affected our religious perspectives and practices too."[48] In other words, much of what it means to be a Christian has been lost. It has been supplanted by relativism, intolerance, and syncretism.

If there is a silver lining to Barna's research, it is that the unchurched are not opposed to considering being a part of the church. That is good news. A surprising statistic about the unchurched that he brings up is that the unchurched are more than likely to look different than the "population norm." They are more likely to be well-educated and economically affluent males. He says that they are not open "people persons" and tend to be less relational and flexible. Surprisingly, they want a church that is caring while they themselves are not willing to put forth much effort to be relational. They did not necessarily believe that what Christianity represents will help them to

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[47] Barna, *Grow Your Church*, 18.

[48] Ibid., 21

overcome their struggles, but yet they are not so closed-minded as to think that religious faith does not hold the answer.

As one contemplates the issues confronting the church, the Body of Christ, it is also easy to see why starting new churches seem to hold so much promise for the survival of the church, both denominationally and personally. Instead of trying to shape a newcomer's identity to meet the ideology of the existing congregation, it is easier to bring people together who have no expectations or little expectation from those around them. For the existing churches to continue to grow and survive in their current form, the hearts of the saints must be changed to make them more acceptable of those coming into the church that do not fit their mold.

With all the obstacles that are already listed, and many more that go unwritten, it will be difficult but not an impossible task to revitalize the existing churches of today. The start of new faith communities is an obvious and exciting venture whose time has come again, as those who have a heart for God venture out into familiar territory seeing it new and fresh for the first time.

The methodology for new church starts has a lot to offer existing congregations who want to revitalize their churches and fulfill the Great Commission. But for every church, new or existing, the impetus for bringing new people into that church must be much more than just filling the pews. The only legitimate reason for starting or for renewing a congregation is winning souls for Jesus Christ. This cannot be a half-hearted attempt. Every step of the way must be carefully plotted with sincerity and love.

So what can an authentic Christian do to increase the Kingdom of God? The rationale behind starting new faith communities, new church starts, is simple. It is about

going and meeting people where they are; it is about telling them of the exciting things that are about to happen in and through this new faith community or existing church; it is about inviting them to become a part of that faith community.

For those persons in an existing church, revitalization may be very difficult because the DNA has become corrupted. To revitalize a congregation or to start a new faith community, it is a prerequisite that people be willing to open their mouths and invite others. Also one must decide what the ultimate end product will look like. Will membership come easily or will membership come with expectations? Membership with expectations will come much easier to those joining a new faith community than it will for those who are joining an existing congregation; the reason for this should be quite obvious. In a new faith community, everybody is joining with the same expectations being placed upon them, but in an existing congregation the expectations will be far from what exists currently if there is any hope to change the DNA of that group.

New church starts rely on a launch team to kickoff corporate worship. The jobs of a launch team member are varied, from those who set up chairs to those who lead worship to many other positions. A launch team is easily made up of about twenty people who are very committed to the launch of the new faith community. They meet weekly in small groups, studying the Bible and planning for the launch of the new church. But this is not all that they do. They also are committed to finding new and exciting ways of meeting people. One of the best methods for doing such is to have block parties in new residential areas. During these parties, they share food, drink, and conversation. Usually in a low-key and nonthreatening manner, they ask the people that they encounter if they would be interested in being part of a new faith community when it launches. From there

they get a name, phone number, or other contact information so that they can begin communicating with these people, keeping them apprised of what is going on and the expected launch date of the first worship services.

Nelson Searcy and Kerrick Thomas, of Journey Church in New York City, write of their experience in putting together a launch team for their new church. "When we arrived in New York City to start The Journey, we did not have a launch team. We did even know anyone in the New York area. An intimidating position to be in, yes, but also one that carries many advantages. In our opinion, having to build a launch team from scratch is ultimately the best-case scenario for your launch. But learning to ask people to join you is an absolute prerequisite to effectively building a team and launching your church."[49] Putting together a launch team from an existing church brings with it the history and the traditions of the church and its people. Some, much, or all of the baggage that the people in the existing church bring with them may be the thing that is already killing the existing congregation.

One logical solution, but not without its own potential problems, is for the pastor or one or two members of the church to start a new church within the church. Without taking people from the existing congregation to start a new worship service, which only tends to thin out the people in each service, these persons can put together what is in essence a new faith community with the hope that, after launching the new faith community, the existing congregation can find mutual ground on which to forge a new and exciting beginning together. But this will take considerable effort. While the new faith community is being forged, the existing faith community will have to learn what it means to be the authentic Body of Christ. That means that they will have to learn how to

[49] Searcy and Thomas, *Launch,* 141.

love and accept others who are different from themselves but have the same heart for God.

Starting a new faith community within an existing faith community has some advantages. The first and largest advantage is that the facilities for them, the new faith community, to meet in already exists. The existing church also brings forth a pastor and a staff that can be shared, significantly lowering the cost associated with a new church start and placing the new faith community several years into the future utilizing the existing staff and ministries. Sharing space does not have to be a problem but this will depend upon the existing congregation and their level of acceptance. Both groups can work out these problems and future opportunities through love and acceptance.

The downside or worst-case scenario is that a new faith community trying to start within an existing faith community will not feel welcome in the existing church and will decide to leave. Whether they stay or leave and become their own church, the ultimate goal has been achieved; the church has reached more people for the Kingdom of God.

CHAPTER FOUR

METHODOLOGY

The first part of the project that needs to be addressed is receiving the blessing of those committees at the project church to allow the project to take place. This project will require the blessing of the Staff Parish Relations Committee, the Finance Committee, and the Church Council. The Staff Parish Relations Committee will be involved due to the added workload of the pastor and the future involvement of the staff members themselves. The Finance Committee will be involved because church funds will need to be spent for the project. It will be necessary to convince the Finance Committee on the use of funds based on the potential payoff of the project for the church. All of these aspects will have to be approved by the Church Council, which oversees all aspects of the church's life.

The project area will need to be defined. This will be determined by several factors, such as the social economics of the project church population and the matching of the actual areas to be targeted. The city is too large to be targeted and beyond the financial ability of the project church; therefore, a determination will have to be made based on financial considerations for the project church as well.

The context of the church is middle to upper middle class. Based on the bias of the membership, the social-economic status of each area will need to meet that of the current context. The church is surrounded by apartments. Some are lower income and

upper income. Effort will have to be made to dissimulate the majority residents of each group of dwellings.

Once all factors are considered, the project officiate will have to choose an area. This will be the area that best fits the demographics of the church and the surrounding community. There are other housing additions that better fit the demographics of the church. These additions are where the membership currently lives. The project will focus on the area directly around the church so that it better approximates that of an older church trying to attract those in the neighborhood around it.

The method used to approach the areas around the church as a medium of meeting and invitation will then be determined. This could take many different avenues. The time of the year will be considered as the method of outreach is decided. Also the availability of certain components of each form of outreach method will have to be considered to see if all of the elements exist and if they are available for the project.

Since this project is a new worship service, then the music must be considered. This will be a contemporary worship service; therefore, a band will be needed or a praise team. Securing a band for the service will require the hiring of an existing band or individual musicians with someone to direct them or a volunteer band made up of local musicians who are willing to share their talents. A director will need to be found. Flyers will need to be made that can be displayed in coffee shops and music stores if a volunteer band is sought. This part of the project should begin as soon as possible. Either circumstance will require that the band learn many different songs that they may not currently know.

Once the band is acquired, then the style of music to be used must be determined. Several selections, about twenty-five to fifty songs, need to be determined for the band to begin practicing. The band will have only three weeks or less before the first preview service, so practice and familiarity with the music must begin immediately. There is the possibility that the band will not already contain someone who can lead praise and worship, and then it will be important that a praise leader be found who can practice with the band as soon as possible.

The form of the neighborhood socials needs to be determined, and also what the elements that are incorporated will look like. The equipment needed for each social will need to be determined and gathered. Decisions will need to be made about how many tables, what utensils will be needed if food is served, and what will be asked of the guests, if anything. All of these questions and several more will need to be answered.

The time of day for each social will also need to be determined, along with any distractions that might interfere with the success of the social. A contingency plan will need to be developed in case a social is rained out. Consideration must be given to what impression the guests leave with and how one will ensure that the correct, positive impression is delivered.

All of the elements of the social should point towards the end goal, in this case the beginning of a new service. The physical elements such as cups, bowls, napkins, and any other objects that can contain a logo should be prepared in advance. An example would be a kite. The kite could contain the logo for the service or church printed on it so that it will be a continued reminder of the upcoming event.

For this project, kites will be employed as a craft for each child who attends. The kites are made from a single sheet of copy paper, a stick, tape, crepe paper, and thread. These elements will need to be to be gathered and, if printing is needed, they will need to be printed or stamped with the logo and instructions.

The announcement of the socials will need to precede them, so it must be determined how this will be done. Since, in this case, there are few people involved, postcards will need to be used. There are three postcards that will be mailed. The first announces the coming of a special event and encourages to watch for additional information that will be coming. The second announces the actual event. The final card will announce the first regular worship service. The first two will be sent to a smaller demographic area than the third, which will be sent to as many homes as finances will allow.

The postcards will need to be designed, either professionally or in house. They will need photography for the front and typesetting for the back. They should be of the highest quality possible, leaving the recipient with the impression that the event being offered is worth his time and interest.

The next step is to find a printer. Someone who is acquainted with the type of printing used in direct mailing is critical. Printing can be done in house if funds are limited, but high quality four-color printing will convey the impression one is trying to cast much better. Once a printer is found, it may offer in house design or readymade cards that can be purchased. A decision will need to be made whether or not to seek professional design help based on the abilities of those on the leadership team. These cards printed in quantity will cost less and are usually of high quality. A decision will

need to be made about using their design processes if using a source other than the printers in house.

Addresses must be obtained for the target area. General delivery to residents can be done, but this does not have the impact of an addressed card. There are several companies that sell address services, and these addresses usually cost three cents each or less. The list will need to be purchased if in house mailing is to be used.

A mailing service is an alternative that can be used instead of doing in house addressing and mailing. The advantage to this type of service is that they handle the mailings. This saves time and effort. One will not wear out volunteers doing laborious hand addressing of cards. Usually, the mailing service already has the address list in house and, since the mailing list of addresses will not have to be purchased, it will help offset the cost of the mailing. A mailing service can also obtain the lowest postal rate, which may offset the cost of using the service.

A preview schedule will need to be set. The dates for the preview services need to be determined so that they can be promoted during the invitation stage of the project. During the ice cream socials, the preview services will be promoted as a way of getting interested parties to engage in the new service.

To be able to hold neighborhood block parties, it is essential that homes are procured to host them. These homes should represent the target area. More than one home per postal delivery route is ideal since each postal delivery route represents about 300 to 500 homes.

Scheduling of the host homes needs to be made as early as possible so mailings can be scheduled. Once the mailing goes out, it is not retrievable. There is no method to

cancel a block party once scheduled; therefore, once scheduled a home needs to be accessible to the leadership team even if the homeowners are not able to be there.

Once the schedule is set, then the postcards that have been ordered can be scheduled for mailing. The first postcard can be mailed anytime, since it is not time sensitive, although it is best to be sent no earlier than necessary. The second invitation needs to be scheduled so that it arrives no more than one week, and preferably no more than three days, before the event. If mailings are to be done in house, then the local postal office should be contacted for a reliable idea of how far in advance the mailings should be made. A mailing service should know and be able to advise on this matter. All other printing needs to be done before the first scheduled event is to be held.

The mailings for each series of postcards must be scheduled. The first and last mailing can be sent out together. The individual event mailings need to be scheduled so that delivery is, as close as possible, three days prior to the event.

It is at this point that the fun begins. Each block party is an opportunity for the leadership to meet new people. It is a party and should look and feel like one. People will be interested in why the party is being held and may even ask. When they show interest, there should be a conversation, asking for future contact information. This information will be used to contact them prior to preview and regular services. Persons showing real interest in the new service should be inquired of their interest in being part of the leadership team for the new service. When they show interest in being part of the leadership team, they are to be invited to the leadership teams Bible study.

Knowing the most advantageous time to begin a new promotion for bringing people to church will help determine the date and the time of the new service. There are

many factors to be considered, such as building usage, when setting the time of the new service. For this project, the projected date is the first Sunday after Labor Day, but the time will need to be determined.

Two months before the new service begins, the preview services should commence. One service each month should be a good start, but a spacing of three weeks apart would work also. The time between preview services are to be used to polish the band and for more recruiting of guests.

Block parties will continue until regular services begin. It is possible, weather permitting, to continue the block parties even after the regular services begin. The more block parties one can hold, the more people can be invited.

Finding leaders should be an ongoing process. A church will constantly need an infusion of new leadership so that the leaders already recruited do not burn out. Inviting and developing new leaders is the ongoing task of the church.

The praise team and band must be monitored regularly so they progress in their abilities week to week. Recruitment of praise team and band members as backups for when others are gone or ill must continue as well.

CHAPTER FIVE

FIELD EXPERIENCE

This project model is based on a similar methodology used in starting a new community of faith, a new church. The theory is to prove that a church with declining attendance or stagnated growth can be revived or rejuvenated using the same methodology taught to new church planters. The time frame for this project will not lend itself to the full use of the methodology employed by a pastor starting a new church from scratch. The normal time frame from beginning to the launch of the first service is usually one year to eighteen months.

This amount of time gives the planting pastor time to form, instruct, and bond with the leadership team. It also gives them time to find or form a praise band or praise team. During this first year, the pastor and team must locate a site that can be used for their initial service and growth period. Renting a school cafeteria is common in this phase.

The normal time for a new church launch is only an estimate and may take more or less time, depending on the skills of the planting pastor among other factors. Sometimes the launch team becomes anxious to move beyond a small group Bible study environment and insists on launching into full time worship with regular worship services. According to New Church Leadership Institute, a premature

launch of less than two hundred people opens the new launch to a higher degree of potential failure.

During this phase of development, the assembled team plans and executes preview services. They also use this time period to go into the community, in ways that are not threatening, to meet and introduce themselves and the new church. They begin to establish relationships with potential new attendees and become involved as part of the leadership team will help launch the new church.

Some of the ways that this process begins to happen is that the planting pastor goes to service club meetings, such as Rotary and the Chamber of Commerce, where they network and recruit people who will become the leadership and initial committee leaders for this faith community's launch. As mentioned earlier, the group begins to meet as a small group where they study the Bible. Over time they become a cohesive unit. This is important to the success of the new community of faith. If the leadership is not all on the same page, having the same goals and values, then the launch may implode almost immediately.

The leadership also becomes the main force in meeting people and inviting them to come and join this new community. The methodology used to meet people will be discussed later.

One place this project differs from a new church start is that a place to worship is already available; any church wishing to increase attendance would also have the advantage of an existing place of worship. It is already a part of the church; therefore, the cost associated with this project will be minimal. Some accommodations will have to be made within the church to make this happen, but little direct financial cost will have to be

incurred to ready the secondary worship center. Some indirect financial costs may be incurred, but this will be dealt with later.

Another place this project will differ from a new church start is that there will not be time to create a new leadership group outside of the project church. Also, any leaders recruited for this project will not have the benefit of spending extended time with the pastor in Bible study prior to the launch of the new service.

New church methodology sets out to form a new faith community where one does not currently exist or where one of a particular denomination does not exist. The new church start pastor usually goes into the community where they know few if any of the people living there. They begin seeking ways to meet people where they will have the opportunity to introduce themselves and their vision for a new church.

The meeting of new people usually takes place by going where people already go: coffee houses, fast food restaurants, and service clubs. They also will place ads in the local newspaper announcing the coming faith community and hosting events to meet new people. If finances are available, direct mail is used. The pastor will use these direct mail pieces to introduce events and themselves and to put forth their desire to meet like-minded people. The desire is to find twenty people who are interested in becoming the leadership and will commit to the new church start.

When the planting pastor begins to gather people, a Bible study is started as a way of putting forth the values of the new community. Through this time together, the leadership team for the new church will form. This is done through the study of Scripture. The pastor helps form a directed collective thought about what the church will be like when it is launched. Part of what they will discuss and agree upon is the amount of

commitment expected from each person to become a member of the leadership team and a member of the church. There is a distinct difference between being a member and attendee. This is a new paradigm within the churches that are being started today. Some churches require that each year their members recommit themselves in writing if they are to stay on the rolls. While it goes beyond the scope of this paper, there is an ethos of high commitment value perceived before people commit today.

Each person on the leadership team will have a job within the church, such as set-up and tear down the worship space on Sunday mornings, leading the children's discipleship class, or some other job. The length of time that the initial leaders retain their position depends on the planting pastor and, if used, the coaches for the new church start.

Some denominations are now using existing churches as launch sites for new plants. They support the launch pastor, and it affords the leadership team a place to worship while they prepare for their launch and while gathering the new flock. This is effective if the support church has the same DNA and identity that the new church start wants to adopt. Some of these parenting churches will ask some of their members to be a part of the new church start for a period of time to help give critical mass to the worship services.

Once formed, the leadership team begins to evangelize the community by various non-threatening means. They may go out either individually, in pairs, or in groups to meet other people. One of the more popular ways of meeting people is to host block parties on the blocks where team members live. People come to the block party and are greeted during this time, told of the formation of the new church, and given the opportunity to receive additional information in the future. If persons are encountered at

these block parties who are interested in the new faith community, they are encouraged to host a block party themselves either in their own block or at a friend's yard.

It is not enough simply to show up and serve ice cream. The leadership team must begin the evangelizing process by completely thinking through what it is they offer. They must go out prepared to offer a printed flyer or postcard about the new faith community or, in the case of this project, a new worship service that will pique community interest. It is also helpful to have information cards or a clipboard where people can sign up for additional information, such as the time and date of planned preview services and the proposed initial launch.

People are offered the information and given cards when they come to the social. This is not a time to be pushy, only informational. When interest is shown, the opportunity to receive more information is offered, and a signup sheet should be easy to find so people who have a good time at the social have the opportunity to receive more information without directly asking. In other words, make it as easy as possible for people to get connected.

Since the starting of a new church was not the aim of the project, it was decided that a new worship service would be a good avenue to test the theory. The project church had already reached an attendance number, in the traditional 10:50 A.M. service, that represented the eighty percent rule for fullness. The eighty percent rule says that when a worship space is eighty percent full, then it will cease to attract new people.[1] If the attendance goes beyond the eighty percent rule, eventually people will stop coming until

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[1] John R. Throop, "If You Build It, Will They Come? Advice from Church Consultants on the Relationship Between Building and Congregational Growth," Christianity Today Online, entry posted January 1, 2000, http://www.christianitytoday.com/yc/2000/janfeb/7.54.html?start=3 (accessed November 1, 2010).

adequate personal space is once again obtained. Including a choir loft that seats thirty-five, the sanctuary of the project church seats a total of 269 people based on the thirty-inch seat rule. The thirty-inch seat rule says that people will require thirty inches of seat per person when pews are used. Therefore, the sanctuary would be considered full when 180 persons were in attendance on any given Sunday.

The eighty percent rule and the thirty-inch rule are not the only theories about personal space. Other thoughts point to a seventy percent rule and also a thirty-six inch seat rule. A worship center that uses chairs instead of pews does not have the same limitations, since the chairs create a boundary for personal space that seems acceptable to most people; this is based on personal experience by the author who worked in churches that have had both chairs and pews.

The project church is blessed with two worship spaces. A new sanctuary was built in 1992 and the older sanctuary, now named Wesley Hall, is used only occasionally as an extension to the fellowship hall. It is used primarily when large dinners or events make it necessary. It has also been used as an additional venue for Sunday school classes, but this has been cured by the introduction of semester Bible studies done in small groups that are mostly held in individual's homes during the week.

Wesley Hall, the secondary sanctuary, makes a good place to start a new service. It has a capacity of about 125 using chairs and can be configured so that an audience of thirty-five to fifty would feel full. Using the main sanctuary with a group of less than 100 would lack critical mass for the space. The use of chairs in Wesley Hall makes it easy to expand or contract the seating area as needed. The need for critical mass is important to the energy level of a worshiping group. If the area is too large and cavernous, then the

dynamics of the group are hindered, just as an area that is overly filled imposes sanctions on some people's personal space. This area dynamic makes the use of the main sanctuary an unlikely candidate for the new service. Since the use of chairs will be employed, the eighty percent rule will be explored as a side bar. The additional space that is not being used is closed off until attendance numbers climb to a level that makes it necessary. In the back a table of food and drink separate this area from the doors, forming a natural place to gather and visit before and after the service.

Originally, the band for the new service was to be found by advertising in local music stores and coffee houses. This did not happen. The worship leader for the new service took it upon herself to find musicians in the existing church and formed a band. The fact that they are very good musicians and committed is a blessing that the author thanks God for every day. The formation of an internal band was both good and bad. It took away what would have been an opportunity to find new people and get them involved. Given a longer frame of time for the formation of a new service, a new band would be a good opportunity for new people to get plugged into the new service. But in hindsight, with the time constraints of the project, it may have been difficult to find and form a band. Since these people were already involved with the pastor in church, a bond already existed similar to one that would form between a planting pastor and the leadership team.

The expense of this project is similar to that for a new church start in several ways. The cost of going into the neighborhoods with ice cream, bowls, spoons, and drinks, along with the materials needed to make kites, would be the same. The kites are made from a single sheet of letter size paper, some tape, a craft stick, crepe paper for a

tail, and some heavy thread used for string. This makes a good flying kite at a cost of about five cents each.

The cost of direct mail would be similar, but the support of a planting pastor, which is the greatest cost, is non-existent since the church already pays for the pastor's support. The use of existing church offices and equipment also lessens the cost as associated with a new church start. The existing church staff had little involvement in the project in an effort to keep it as close to the new church start model as possible. The existing staff did became involved post launch as they took the place of the leadership team's duties in the area of children's ministries, leading worship, and worship planning.

The expense of this project was approved by the project church's Finance Committee based on the rationale that five new families would, over the course of one year at the church's average per unit giving, cover the additional cost of advertising. The projected cost of advertising was three to four thousand dollars. As a side note, the Finance Committee increased the advertising budget by more than double after the launch of this project. Also, the various leadership groups within the church gave their approval and official support.

There was little interaction or support sought from the existing congregation in an effort to replicate a church that was dying or one that did not want to grow. The major committees of the church were addressed with the project, and their blessing was received. At one point, the author found it necessary to address the entire congregation about the project. There were fears that everything was going to change, and somehow they were going to lose their existing service. The only concession that had to be made by the main service was their worship time was reduced from one hour and ten minutes to

just an hour. This time reduction was needed to make it possible for the pastor to move from one sanctuary to the other. Nothing in the traditional service changed because of the ten-minute time reduction. This time was made up by being more intentional about movement on the chancel, which actually improved the quality of the service.

There are other ways of starting a new church. There is a model where the sponsor church, also known as the mother church, recruits persons from their existing congregation to, for a period of time, salt the new service to give it critical mass. A different model has the mother church starting satellite churches in different locations where people are not being reached; these churches remain a part of the sponsor church and usually carry their DNA. Without a leadership team, and not wishing to decimate the existing worship service to start the new contemporary service by asking people to leave and help start a new service, the project was done using direct mail and limited help. Since getting the word out about the starting of a new church service was limited by the time constraints of the project, the block parties seemed the most viable and effective avenue.

The limiting of help was important for a couple reasons. A new pastor is usually dropped into an area with little or no help. It is up to that pastor to form the needed relationships and build a team that will bring leadership to the new church and act as the launch team for its first services. An existing church that has few people in it who to turn their church around (few could mean literally few members interested in making their church grow) would have many of the same challenges as those found in this project. A church that really wanted to grow and had a congregation that was heavily invested in such a project would certainly face fewer challenges, as many hands make the work light.

Getting the word out about the block parties required the use of bulk mail. Research was done to find a company that could produce and mail postcards at a reasonable rate and with a quality that left the recipient with the impression that the sender was an excellent choice. This is an area the author found that considerable learning was required and, therefore, it ate into the time constraints of the project.

There are several companies that specialize in the kind of marketing this project required. The cost and restrictions of using such companies were outside the funding available for this campaign. A local printer with a high-speed four-color press was found. He was able to produce a product that was of the same high quality as the specialty companies and was able to do it more economically and with fewer restrictions. In other words, there were less cost and smaller runs. The selected printer suggested a local bulk mail company that specialized in smaller jobs. This company fit the needs nicely, and they helped to educate the author in the best and most cost effective way to use the service. The project church already had a required bulk mail permit, and the cost associated with mailing postcards was researched. The cost for the church to do the mailing was eleven cents per card, as opposed to twenty-seven cents per card for first class mail. Through the bulk mail company, the project was able to mail each card for eight cents. The bulk mail company addressed the cards, in the name of the resident, and mailed the cards. Eight cents was the cost of postage only, but the overall cost of using the bulk mail company was less than the cost of the church using the bulk mail rate it had with volunteers addressing the cards.

Custom postcards were designed, in about three days per card setup, printed, and sent out to 7,500 residences in certain postal delivery routes within the zip code

surrounding the project church. These postal delivery routes were chosen because of their proximity to the church and based on their demographics, as provided by the direct mailing company that matched the existing demographics of the congregation. The first card announced a future ice cream social that would be held in the recipient's housing area at a future date. It also contained instructions to look for additional information that would announce the time and place for their area.

One place where the existing congregation became involved was through a request to use the parishioner's front yards to hold the neighborhood ice cream socials. Out of the 350 people who make up the average attendance of 237 people, on any given Sunday only five people offered the use of their homes, and three of these were not in the postal zip code area that had been targeted for the project. The other two volunteers indicated it would be necessary to hold their neighborhood block party close to the end of the project. Scheduling problems prohibited the use of one house. and the other did not become available until after the inaugural worship service had already happened.

It was initially decided to use one of the homes outside the given zip code as the site of the first block party and manually deliver a postcard to each home in their area announcing the first social. Then a second invitation would be delivered by hand just before the social. The second invitation would contain the time and address of the social along with an invitation to bring their favorite topping to share. This flyer would be hand delivered. The flyer would also state that there would be a table set up where each child could build her own kite.

This home was chosen because of the family's enthusiasm about the project and because they were part of the developing worship team. The host family went to gain the

approval from their homeowner's association president. They were informed that they would not be allowed to host the social if the church was involved because "they did not allow proselytizing in their neighborhood."

This decision set the initial thrust of the project back for two weeks as the problem was considered and a solution found. With no homes readily available, the second mailings went out inviting the residents in the postal delivery routes closest to the church to come to the church on a given day of the week. These were sent out so the timing of the cards corresponded with the timing for their area. There were eight socials held on various days of the week. The turnout was dismal. No day fared better than any of the others, but this should not be considered conclusive for future efforts due to the limited expanse of the project.

For the first two socials, the postal system did not get the cards into the hands of the residents in a timely manner. Normal delivery for bulk mail is two to three days but the post office has up to two weeks to deliver bulk mail. The timing of the mailing was based on the experience of the bulk mailer but fell outside the norm.

The other six events produced a couple of families but was far less than the expected one percent response rate for bulk mail. At this point, one can only theorize why the return was so low. The best educated guess is that while people will turn out for a block party, as indicated by other church planters hosting them on their block, they are not as likely to go to a church to be entertained if they have no experience with the church. The first person to respond was a woman who had attended the project church in the mid to late 1960s. She had been baptized in the church and, after leaving, had no

additional affiliation with any church. She told us she was going to come to church and bring her son, which she did after the launch of the new service.

A third postcard was mailed just prior to the launch of the new service, which was slated to begin on September 14. The postcard offered not only information about the new service but contained an equal amount of information on all three services that the church would offer. The third postcard was delivered to the same 7,500 residents, and an additional 7,500 cards were sent to another zip code where many of the existing members reside. The second zip code did not receive any other mailings.

The response to the mailings was surprising. While some people came to the new service, it was mainly attended by persons within the church who wanted a service with contemporary music. The unforeseen benefit of the project was the increase of first time guests to the two existing services. The information received by the church from these guests show that they came from the area that received three cards. If there were guests from the zip code that only had one mailing, they chose not to leave contact information.

Like most churches and all United Methodist churches, attendance is tracked so the church can tell how effective they are in their discipleship and evangelistic efforts. The project church is no different, and the statistics gathered give great insight into the effectiveness of the project. The Way, the name of the new worship service, is a good means of measure for the effectiveness of such a campaign. Since the service did not exist prior to the project, it is fairly easy to see how effective the project and its mailing components were in attracting new people.

The new service attracted forty-four new guests from its beginning on September 14, 2010, through March 20, 2011. The church as a whole had attracted a total of ninety-

four guests in the eight months preceding the new service's inauguration. The church, prior to the start of the new service, had two worship services. During that eight-month time period, the attendance breakdown was seven guests attending the early, 8:30 A.M. service and eighty-seven in the traditional, 10:50 A.M. service.

One of the unforeseen benefits of the project was the number of guests that were attracted to all services. While the new service saw a total of forty-five guests, the early service attracted a total of thirteen new guests, the highest number of new guests for this service in the last five years and eighty-seven new guests to the traditional service. This is a total of 134 guests, an increase of forty-two percent in a time frame of only seventy-five percent of the pre-project attendance time frame.

During the time following the project, the church has experienced the joining of nine new members, four of whom were directly a result of the project. Two of these were new confessions of faith. Also, four of those joining the church came from the early service, which had not seen anyone join the church in over five years.

The areas that received multiple mailings produced a response rate of 2.586 percent. The area that received only one mailing produced a zero response rate. While the ice cream socials were not very successful, the advertising campaign returned a response rate of more than two times the expected rate according to one national mailing house. One could argue that the invitation to engage the community personally may have made the difference in fostering a larger response rate, but that would be speculation at this junction. More research will need to be done to prove its value, yet new church start pastors affirm the value of such socials in meeting new people, inviting and introducing them to their new churches.

As part of the ongoing investigation of this project, there are plans to continue the efforts already begun. Some shift in focus from ice cream to hot chocolate will be necessary due to seasonal changes but nonetheless will continue. As more data is collected, the process will become more defined for future churches that wish to use this methodology as a platform to engage their community.

To reiterate, the end result at the time of this writing is that the new service has already produced several people who became new members, and several others have joined the church in the other services. During the two and one-half years the author has served in the church, this is the first time anyone has joined the church in the earliest service. There are several new guests to the other services who have also inquired about membership or more information about joining the church. Given more time, it is the belief of the author that this methodology could produce significant results for a church that is trying to grow or turnaround a declining congregation.

CHAPTER SIX

REFLECTION, SUMMARY, AND CONCLUSION

It was a whirlwind summer for the author, with almost every evening and weekend taken up by the church and the project. The initial preparation time for a project such as this would require more than six weeks. But to do such a project, in an existing church that was willing to do the work and who wanted to reach people, it could easily do this type of project in less than one year and make it very successful. The hard part about determining success and failure is based upon the benchmarks, the collective thought, that have already been set within most churches for their existing programs.

For instance, a church of one hundred people may not consider a fellowship dinner to be successful if only thirty people from the congregation participated. Many churches of small membership have the idea that unless almost everyone in the church participates in any particular social event, then they were not successful. Statistically, if we press those same attitudes towards church growth, then any campaign that did not increase the church's attendance by at least eighty percent is not successful. The truth is for a church to have an increase in average attendance in the range of five to ten percent per year, that church is experiencing significant growth. Therefore, a church of one hundred or less that takes on such a project, and develops a leadership team of fifteen or twenty people that become committed to a small group and the church, represents church growth in the fifteen to twenty percent range or more based on the size of the church.

A church that can increase its attendance by fifteen to twenty percent per year is doing a phenomenal job. Rarely, except in a new church start, does the church experience this type of growth. What is it about a new church start that makes them grow? What is it about an existing church that keeps them from growing? There are two things that answer this question: excitement and commitment. People who are coming to a new church get excited about their new church. There is something about excitement that breeds excitement. One also sees the same dynamic in a worship service that is heavily attended compared to a worship service that is sparsely attended. The enthusiasm of the heavily attended worship service becomes contagious. On the other hand, the sparsely attended worship service lacks the dynamic and interaction that breeds such excitement.

The excitement is only part of the equation. The other part of that success equation is commitment. New churches tend to grow because the people that start them are invested in that church's success, and, therefore, they are committed to seeing that the church is successful. This commitment plays itself out not only in worship attendance, not only in sharing the excitement with others, not only in inviting others, but it also plays itself out in service. As a church begins to age, there is generally less commitment generation to generation as the population within that church moves farther and farther away from the founding generation. Each succeeding generation becomes less and less invested. This, of course, is a generality and thankfully there are some churches that have managed to dodge this lack of generational commitment. Yet for the majority of the churches today, one could safely say that this is the case.

Every church is only one or two generations away from dying without an infusion of new blood. The more generations that a church has missing, the more difficult it is for

that church to attract those missing generations. It is even more difficult for a church to attract generations who are two and three generations removed. So, it is in the best interest of every church that they never cease reaching out to more and more people, making sure that each successive generation is adequately represented.

Every church is built on relationships. As one reads all of the materials that are available regarding church growth, the bottom line is that personal relationships are what truly build a church. Alice Mann, in her October 2010 conference for the Oklahoma United Methodist Church, says unless a visitor meets at least three people, the odds are against that visitor ever coming back. Unless a visitor makes a new acquaintance within the first seven minutes of coming into the church, she probably will not return. Some people come to a church because they like the preaching style of the pastor or have been befriended by the pastor. When that pastor leaves, more often than not, that person also will leave unless she has made significant relationships with other persons in the church.

One of the most difficult things for a pastor to overcome is getting people to invite others to church. One of the main excuses this author has heard from parishioners is that all of their friends go to church. When you ask them about inviting strangers, they allude to the fact that they are too shy to invite someone they do not know. How then does one get the people inside the church to befriend and invite those outside the church?

Since church growth is about relationships, it is imperative that people in the church have the opportunity to meet people outside of the church, become a friend to them, and form those relationships that will conclude in invitation and acceptance. That is really what this project is all about. It is about going into the neighborhoods and meeting

people. It is about striking up a conversation and offering non-threatening invitations. The more invitations that are offered, the more likely the person invited will accept.

The form of invitation used in this project was offered through the medium of ice cream. The neighborhoods were invited, one neighborhood at a time, to come and participate in an ice cream social. Originally, they were to be held in the neighborhoods where the people resided, but this fell through from the beginning. The people of the church would not invite the author to use their front yards to hold the socials. Only five people offered, and three of them were in the wrong zip code for the project.

According to the majority of the books that this author read, the first and largest problem with which one has to contend is getting those inside the church on board with any project that involves reaching out to persons that they do not personally know. The time frame needed to sell a congregation on any such project is lengthy. Therefore it becomes difficult, especially in any short time frame, to get a congregation actively involved. This project required only the authorizations of leadership and a few people who are enthusiastic about making it happen. Since it is so difficult to get persons in an existing church to help with such a new project, it was decided that no help would be sought from within the church. The assistance that was requested did not materialize. Outside the praise band, almost no help was received. The band members were enthusiastic and, therefore, invited their friends and family to preview services that were held on Thursday evenings once a month before regular services began. These services drew between forty-five and fifty attendees. The only other help received was from the minister's wife and a family of four.

A new church start pastor, especially one doing a parachute drop, has no help in the beginning. One can only imagine what a difference it would make if a new church start had many people who were willing to go out and invite others. It would probably look like an existing church whose members were on fire to reach people for the Gospel of Jesus Christ, trying to transform their community. Twelve men transformed the world because of the love they had for Jesus Christ. A church of one hundred committed believers should be able to transform an entire community. The level of commitment is the difference between a new church start and an existing church. An existing church that really wants to grow will require the same kind of commitment that those in a new church start possess. It is this intentionality that makes the difference, their level of commitment. The pastor of a new church start does not have the luxury of having many people who go out and spread the word about the new church plant from the beginning. A new church start pastor has to work day and night trying to meet people that will become the leadership of the new church start. One pastor can only be in so many places in a week's time, so it becomes imperative to use other methods rather than one-on-one encounters that are available. One such method is the use the printing and mailing of postcards advertising the new church's gatherings and preview services. With very little assistance available, the printing and mailing of postcards were utilized. Some other avenues that could be used are cookouts in the park, arrangement of a golf tournament, concerts in the park once a band is available, and with a little imagination many other avenues can be found. As an ongoing effort to continue the research of this project and to increase the visibility of the new service, several of these avenues will be used in the coming summer.

There were several problems encountered in the acquisition and distribution of the postcards. Originally, the postcards were going to be purchased and distributed by a national company that specializes in such offerings for churches. They were able and willing to do custom printing, but the cost of distribution and mailing was much more than this project could afford. The cost of mailing to a complete zip code was very reasonable on a per piece basis. But to try to print and distribute to specific areas within a zip code more than doubled the cost. Multiple mailings were required and the cost of doing multiple mailings to smaller areas became prohibitive. If these mailings were going to happen a different avenue had to be found.

A local printer with a high speed four color press, whose quality was just as good as the national company, was found. The designs of the postcards were done in house by the author. These designs were then emailed to the company, who returned a proof, and then printed the cards. One mistake the author made was in the printing of color on only one side. The cost of color one side or both from this printer were the same and full color cards would have been more impressive. The cards were still running in high volume, about 7,500 pieces per run. Once a printer had been secured the problem of distribution still existed. The printer suggested the name of a company that they did business with, who specialized in smaller distribution runs. The cards were sent directly to the direct mail company who addressed cards and mailed them to specific postal delivery routes, according to the distribution timeframe that was required.

The project church itself could have mailed the postcards for as little as eleven cents each but the cards would still have to be addressed. Once a distribution list of addresses was acquired, it would be a very time consuming job to address such a large

run of cards and sort them according to their postal delivery routes. The direct mail company handled this job quickly and lowered the cost of mailing. The cost of postage came down to eight cents each using this service.

The postal service has ten days to deliver bulk mail. The normal delivery time experienced by the direct mail company was two to three days. The first mailers went out and were delivered in two to three days to almost every postal delivery. The second mailer sent to specific postal delivery routes took longer than the normal to be delivered and, therefore, the first ice cream social came and went before the postcards arrived. The rest of the mailers were received in the time frame that the direct mail service quoted as the norm.

There were several problems encountered from the project church. Originally, the ice cream socials were to be held in the neighborhoods where the people resided but this fell through from the beginning. The people of the church would not volunteer the use their front yards to hold the socials to the author. Only five people offered and three of them were in the wrong zip code for the project. It was decided that the first social would be held outside the target zip code, and the invitations would be hand delivered to the homes in that area. The homeowners went to their homeowners association to secure permission to have the ice cream social. They were told that they could, but the neighborhood association would not allow the block party to happen as long as there was a church involved.

This revelation required action, and a new plan had to be put in place. It was decided that the local parks would be used, but the time needed to secure a site at the parks ate into the time allowed for the project. Therefore, a decision was made to hold the

first socials at the church since it stood in the middle of several postal delivery routes. This decision proved not to be good for trying to draw people to the socials. As presented by other church planters, having the socials at the church somehow became a barrier to their coming and enjoying the fellowship being offered.

The church itself became problematic, as those who did not understand what was taking place became opposed to the start of a new service, stating that it would be divisive. There was a contingent within the church that voiced the need for the service, and some had even thought about seeking a different place to go to church so they could have the kind of service that appealed to them. Some within the church complained that the pastor was putting all his time into the new service to the exclusion of everything else. They were unaware that he was working sixty or more hours per week to make sure everything got covered. The space for the worship service was used only occasionally for different things, yet the idea of using it every week for a worship service caused problems, even among the staff, because changes might have require adjustments to the way things had been done in the past.

It is not hard to see why churches have problems growing and accepting changes. The focus was too inward and, until they turn their focus outward to those outside of the church, it will be difficult for growth to happen. A limited amount of time was spent with the different groups in the church who were the decision makers and the church board. A short time was spent in front of the entire congregation, assuring them that nothing was going to change in their primary service, and that equal time was being given to the rest of the church, not just the new service. But in the end, the gossip mill still worked

overtime. It was disappointing that the people in the project church did not, for the most part, catch the vision that was being cast.

The time frame for such a project needs to be longer. As stated, the project church had been receiving the word that it needed to turn its focus outward, and the congregation needed to get involved in the mission of making disciples by inviting people to worship and other church functions. Two years had passed since this word was placed before them at least fifty percent of the time. One would have thought they would be ready for this simple project. They were not. A dedicated amount of time needed to be spent selling the specific project, getting everyone onboard, at least in principle, and most of the people agreed to be actively involved in making it happen.

While most church growth books say that it takes from three to eight years to sell people on a project, the author is convinced that it can be done in a year or less. A year of building a leadership team of twenty people alone would result in an increase of twenty percent or more members for most churches in America. Fifty-nine percent of the churches in America worship between seven and ninety-nine people each week, with a mean average of seventy-five worshipers per week.[1] This statistic would make a leadership group of twenty-six percent increase in the average American church. This statistic is staggering when the average American church is dying instead of growing. The United Methodist Church in the Oklahoma Annual Conference was given a mandate to grow the attendance of each church's worship and Sunday school by five percent in 2008. Few churches accomplished this, and few came even close. Reaching people for

[1] Average Worship Size in American Churches, http://hirr.hartsem.edu/research/fastfacts/fast_facts.html#sizecong (accessed January 20, 2011).

Jesus Christ is possible if the church will just go back to the basics of the faith, being relational.

Besides the aforementioned, more time could have been spent on designing the mailers, or a professional graphic artist could have been enlisted. The postcards could have been printed two-sided, in four-color, for the same price as two-sided with color on one side and black print on the other. This would have made them more attractive. A smaller target area could have been selected and become the primary focus of the project. A base of homes that would allow their use and, whose owners might even help, could have been secured before deciding on a target area. More frequent mailings to a smaller area could be more effective. This would allow a closer approximation to saturation for the area. Banners and signs are prohibited by city code without a permit. But the expense of banners would have increased visibility and awareness of the impending ice cream socials and the new worship service that was coming.

There are many other things that could have been done differently or added to the effort to make it more successful. Business cards could have been distributed during the preview services, encouraging those attending to invite others to the next service. Postcards could have been made available for attendees to address and the church to mail inviting others to the next service. Social networking could have been more heavily used. A Web page could have been established with a video of the preview service so people could see if this service would interest them. Those committed to the new service could have invited more people. This is not an exhaustive list of what could have been done, but some thoughts to help consider what other avenues are available to reach people.

Forming the band from the existing congregation worked well. The members of the band were already committed to the church and had a history with the author. For an existing church wishing to start a new service as a form of outreach, the raising up of a band from within the congregation could help to get current church members invested in the new service. One needs to make sure that the band is always open to new persons from outside the current church membership. This will allow the band to be expanded and make it easier for new people to be able to participate. Having only one band can be problematic; it means that the members of the band cannot take vacation. This makes the need for a second band or extra musicians a necessity, and having back-up musicians or even a second band opens the door to more involvement.

Three mailings were made to about thirty percent of the target zip code, and a single mailing was sent to a secondary zip code. The visitors who responded to the mailings were considerable. The phone representative from the national company that had been consulted told the author a response of less than one-half of one percent was all that could be expected even with multiple mailings. The project saw a response of twelve to fifteen people from the area of the multiple mailings and zero from the area of the single mailing. One of the selling points of the project had been that if a response of five new families came to the church, then the money spent on advertising would be recouped by the financial giving of the new families over the course of one year, based on the per unit giving average that existed.

This project was a good start, but continual efforts must be made for its potential to be fully realized. The author believes that continual mailings and invitations will continue to yield new visitors. One thing the church must do is improve retention of new

guests. They must become more welcoming and inclusive. Ice cream and kites alone will not grow the church. They are just a medium through which people can meet new persons, giving guests an opportunity to enter a relationship with church members, the church, and with Jesus Christ.

Nothing was said about the kites other then they were there for children who attended to make and keep. The kites were made from a single sheet of copy paper with instructions and the new service's logo printed on it. The paper was folded and a single stick was taped across the width of the kite to stiffen it, heavy sewing thread was used for string, and crepe paper was used for a tail. The estimated cost per kite was four to five cents each. They flew even in somewhat high winds, fifteen to twenty miles per hour, and showed to be fairly durable. But the important thing was that the children and adults who built and flew them had a great time. There are several different kinds of kites that can be made as cheaply and easily for those who want to offer a variety or for those who intend to do monthly socials.

The leadership of the new service is still considering different ways to get the word out to the community. One of the major decisions that had to be made for the new service was the time of day it would be held. There were those who wanted it to continue on Thursday nights, which was when the preview services were held. And there were those who wanted it to be a simulcast service that took place at the same time the traditional service was taking place in the other sanctuary. There was even discussion about a late Sunday afternoon service or a service that started half an hour after the traditional service started so the preacher could move from one service to the other, enabling the pastor to preach them both live.

The decision was made to start the service between the early service and the traditional service. This meant that two Sunday school times would have to be offered for children and adults. The timing is still in discussion after several months. There is good reason to consider an evening service. Many of the people who would attend will not get up early on Sunday mornings, and many people work on Sundays, which prohibits them from attending. While no decision has been made to move the service or to add an additional service, there is ongoing conversation. The service time will vary for different communities and situations.

There were some unexpected blessings from this project. It attracted visitors to the service, but it also attracted visitors to both of the other services. It is rare to have visitors in the early service, but the mailers attracted several new guests. The traditional service actually saw the highest number of first time guests of the three services. Three families have since joined the church. One family joined from the new service, one from the early service, and one from the traditional service. The new service has attracted existing members, which has eased the overcrowding in the traditional service. This has made more personal space available, and it has done so without hurting the existing service or reducing its numbers below critical mass.

This is a replicable system that could be used by virtually any church, anywhere. Looking at it, one might think it would be best used in areas where the population is dense, but it could be used equally as well in smaller communities. The cost associated with the project will vary, depending upon the desired outcome. Where a church wants growth and is committed and willing to do the legwork, it could be duplicated at little

expense. This means that a church with limited resources could duplicate this methodology and be just as successful as a large church that has more resources.

The time frame for its use and completion will depend upon the commitment of those involved. From this project one can see that, even with limited involvement and resources, a positive outcome can be had. A longer time frame to execute such a project would only enhance the likeliness of its success and viability. The execution of this project repeatedly, over the course of several months or years, will help move those who use it closer to realizing the full potential of what it means to be the Body of Christ, making disciples for the transformation of the world.

APPENDIX A

CONTEXT EXPANDED

The population clock denotes the population of The United States as being 306,096,805 and of the world as being 6,769,482,930 as of 01:58 GMT (EST+5) on March 28, 2009.[1]

While the world's population is expected to be 6,790,062,216 on 07/01/09, an increase of three percent; the population of The United States is expected to be 306,728,189, which is an increase of three percent. Therefore the population growth of the United States is in line with the population growth of the rest of the world by percentile.

As of 2007, the United States was the third most populated country in the world. It was only eclipsed by China with 1,321,851,888 and India with a population of 1,129,866,154.[2]

The population of the United States is changing at a steady pace. The source of additions and deletions from the population come from three sources: births, deaths, and immigration:

One birth every .....7 seconds
One death every .....12 seconds
One international migrant (net) every..... 36 seconds
Net gain of one person every..... 13 seconds[3]

There were 33 million people added to the population of the United States between 1990 and 2000. Of the 33 million people that added to the population, 1.7 million of them were people that moved into the United States from abroad. This is the

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[1] U. S. Census Bureau, "U. S. and World Population Clocks," http://www.census.gov/main/www/popclock.html (accessed January 21, 2011).

[2] "World's 50 Most Populous Countries: 2007," http://www.infoplease.com/ipa/A0004391.html (accessed January 21, 2011).

[3] Census Bureau, Population Clocks.

largest increase in the nation's history. As people came into the country, the population center shifted as more and more people relocated from the Northeast to the West and South. About one in five people moved into better housing than they had. More than ten percent of the population moved from rental property into owned homes.[4]

Families made up 69 percent of households in 2000 compared to 81 percent just thirty years earlier. Married couples with children under eighteen years of age made up 24 percent of households, down from 40 percent in 1970. In 1996, 71 percent of all children were living with both biological parents. Nine percent lived with one biological parent and a stepparent, and only 2 percent of children living in a two parent household were adopted.[5]

Many of the numbers found in the census need to be studied in light of the changing demographics of the times in which they were collected. High enrollment in elementary through high school during the 2000 census is a product of baby boomers, women in particular, reaching their childbearing prime between 1981 and 1994. Sixty-five percent of all students in 2000 had baby boomer parents.

Education for the vast majority of the young people has continued to grow in importance over the years. Young people between the ages of twenty-five and twenty-nine represent an 88 percent completion rate for high school. This may be driven by the knowledge that even a little post secondary education is associated with higher earnings

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[4] U. S. Census Bureau, "America at the Dawn of a New Century," http://www.census.gov/population/www/pop-profile/files/2000/chap01.pdf (accessed January 21, 2011).

[5] Ibid.

throughout the wage earners lifetime. Even one year of post secondary education increased the earnings by an average of three hundred forty dollars ($340) per month.[6]

While the geographical center of the United States has not moved, the population center of the country has moved, as stated previously. It has moved twelve miles south and thirty-three miles west. A spot near Edgar Springs, Missouri, is now the population center of the country. During the 1990s, every state gained in population by an average of thirteen percent. The Western states led the way with an impressive twenty percent growth rate thanks to Nevada's sixty-six percent and Arizona's forty percent growth rate. While not the largest percentile of growth, California had the largest numerical growth, adding over four million people.[7]

The south was the second fastest growing area in the country with an average of 17 percent growth. Georgia had the largest percentile of growth. Florida and Texas led the way in numerical growth with a combined total of six million eight hundred thousand (6.8 million) people. The 2000 census showed that metropolitan areas across the country saw faster growth than did nonmetropolitan areas. [8]

According to the 2000 census, 75 percent of the population was White; 12 percent of the population was Black or African-American; 12 percent were Hispanic or Latino; and those of Asian descent made up almost 4 percent of the population. A group consisting of American Indian, Alaska Native, Native Hawaiian, and other Pacific

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[6] Ibid.

[7] Ibid.

[8] Ibid.

Islander together represented 1 percent of the population. Slightly over 2 percent of the population indicated that they were more than one race.[9]

The population of the United States is aging. The median age of the population in 2000 was slightly over 35 years of age. This is the highest median age recorded. It represents a rise of 2.4 years in the median age since 1990. This also represents a decline of 4 percent in the number of people between the ages of 18 and 34. While those in early adulthood are declining in number, there was a 28 percent increase in the number of people between the ages of 35 and 64; also for the first time the population above 65 years of age grew at a slower rate than the general population.[10]

Trying to track the population the United States is a monumental task. As alluded to earlier, a great deal of the population is on the move. Some 43 million people in the United States moved between the years 1999 in the year 2000. While there are a vast majority of reasons for the moves, new or better housing and greater economic opportunity were among the main reasons for moving. The majority of people who moved during this time frame remained in same county, while 20 percent stay within the state and 19 percent moved to a different state.[11]

Young adults ages 20 to 29 were more likely to move during this time period than any other group. Adults moved at a rate of almost twice that of all other groups combined. All young adults were likely to move those between the ages 65 and 84 rarely relocated; in fact only 4 percent moved.[12]

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[9] Ibid.

[10] Ibid.

[11] Ibid.

[12] Ibid.

It was not only age that was a determining factor in moves, but marital status also had a bearing on the rate of moves. Both singles and divorced people were more likely to move than those who were married and widows were least likely to move. Education also plays a part in the number of moves made by the population. The year 2000 showed 14 percent of high school graduates moving for work-related reasons. By comparison 25 percent of the population with a Bachelor's degree and 28 percent of the population with a master's degree or higher relocated for a new job or as a job transfer.[13]

Childbearing patterns have changed dramatically since the turn of the early 1900s. Before the Great Depression, a woman had about four children during her childbearing years. The Great Depression saw that number drop to only two, but the number began to climb after the Second World War to almost pre-depression rates. By the middle of the 1970s, the birth rate had dropped to just below the rate during the Great Depression and has remained fairly constant for last 20 years. While the average birth rate has leveled off at 1.8 births, the Hispanic birth rate still remains at 2.5 births on average by the age of 40 to 44.[14]

By the year 2000, almost twice as many mothers with infant children were working or looking for work than in 1976. But the trend of working mothers may have leveled off or even began to decline. Since 1998, there are 4 percent fewer women with infants children in the work force.[15]

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[13] Ibid.

[14] Ibid.

[15] Ibid.

Between 1999 and 2000, there were 1.2 million women who gave birth out of wedlock. The statistics for unmarried births show that 80 percent of teenagers who gave birth were unmarried. Forty percent of women in their early 20s who gave birth were unmarried compared with only one in eight women ages 30 and older. Educational level also has a significant bearing on out-of-wedlock childbearing. Of those giving birth out of wedlock, 54 percent did not have a high school diploma, 32 percent had some college, and only 4 percent of the mothers who gave birth out of wedlock had a Bachelor's degree.[16]

There has been a decline of married families with children, down to only 24 percent. This is a drop of sixteen percent since 1970. The number of married couples without children, during the same period of time, has remained virtually unchanged. Many people see couples cohabitating as normal, yet the statics indicate that only 4 percent of the population was cohabitating in the year 2000.

Many young Americans have decided to postpone getting married. The median age forty years ago was twenty-one for women, slightly higher for men. The median age for women, as of the 2000 census, had risen to twenty-five and for men twenty-seven. This may be a significant factor in the decline of married-couple families with children. The number of women age 30 to 34 who never married tripled during the same forty years, and the number of men increased 6 percent to 30 percent. By the age of thirty-five, about 74 percent were married, and by age sixty-five the numbers were closer to 95 percent.[17]

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[16] Ibid.

[17] Ibid.

In 1980, 77 percent of all children under the age of eighteen lived with two parents; however, by the year 2000 only 69 percent lived with two parents. Over the same period, the number of children living with a single mother accounted for 18 percent.[18]

The year 2000 found 4 million children, about 5 percent of all children, living in the home of a grandparent. Fourteen percent of these children had a mother and father living with them. The majority of these children, 45 percent, lived with only a mother in residence. The second largest group, in this category, was children living with only their grandparents, 35 percent.[19]

Eighty-eight percent of children living with two parents, in 1996, lived with both biological parents. Blended families, typically formed when remarriage occurs, represented 17 percent of all children.[20]

Children twelve years and younger, in 1993, were found to have slightly better than a 50 percent chance of being in daycare outside that of family members. The average child three years old or younger began their child care experience at six months of age.[21]

A few words about where we live will give us insight into those around us and the quality of life they experience. America had 112 million housing units that were occupied year-round. Ownership of these homes was highest in the suburbs and non-metropolitan areas, 74 and 75 percent respectively. Only about half of all inner city homes were owner occupied. Eighty-two percent of these owners lived in standalone homes, while 5 percent

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[18] Ibid.

[19] Ibid.

[20] Ibid.

[21] Ibid.

lived in attached single owner occupied units, such as townhomes. Eight percent of homeowners lived in mobile homes.[22]

Renters occupied one-third of the single attached and detached housing units. Another one-third lived in multi-unit complexes of ten units or more. The median cost of housing was $581 for the homeowner and $580 dollars for cash renters. Twenty-seven percent of homeowners had monthly costs of $300 or less. Twelve percent of renters enjoyed the same expenditure. Twenty-six percent of homeowners had monthly expenditures of $1,000 or more, compared to only 10 percent of cash renters.[23]

White non-Hispanics were more likely to be homeowners at 74 percent, with Asian and Pacific Islanders at 51 percent, Blacks at 46 percent, and Hispanics at 46 percent. Two percent of all occupied housing units had severe physical problems, plumbing, heat and air, electrical, or other maintenance issues.[24]

Education plays a big part in who we are as citizens. The United States saw, in the year 2000, 8 million children in nursery school or kindergarten and 33 million children in elementary school. Also 16 million students attended high school and 15 million attended college. [25]

Since nursery school is mostly private, it is not available to everyone. Over half of all three and four-year-olds whose families made more than $40,000 a year were in school. Those whose parents made $20,000 or less were 15 percent less likely to be in school. The educational attainment of the parents also factored in to those who attend

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[22] Ibid.

[23] Ibid.

[24] Ibid.

[25] Ibid.

nursery school. Children with mothers who are college graduates were 32 percent more likely to attend nursery school compared to those who mothers did not finish high school.[26]

Most children five-years-old were in kindergarten in the year 2000, but 14 percent were still in nursery school and six percent were already in first grade. Kindergarten enrolment was 4 million children, and, of those, 60 percent had been in nursery school the previous year.[27]

The year 2000 saw a record number of students enrolled in elementary and high school at 49 million. This beat the record set in 1970 as the children of baby boomers were attending school; now it is their children whose children are in school. A sad statistic is that in the year proceeding October 2000, 488,000 students dropped out of school. This represents almost 5 percent of all students in the 10th through 12th grades. The dropout rate was 7.4 percent higher for students from families with an annual income of less the $20,000 compared to those whose income was twice that amount.[28]

Of the graduates from the class of 2000, 43 percent found themselves enrolled in college. These new high school graduates made up a part of the more than 15 million college students that year. Women made up 56 percent of those attending college classes. The year 1979 found eighty-four percent of college attendees were White and 10 percent were Black. By the year 2000 we found a decrease in the percentage of White students,

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[26] Ibid.

[27] Ibid.

[28] Ibid.

down to 69 percent, and an increase in the percentage of Black students, up to 14 percent. The year 2000 also found 12 percent of all college students were foreign born.[29]

Americans are becoming more educated than ever before. The percentage of adults with a high school diploma has continued to rise with 80 percent completing high school. And we see that 25 percent of all adults over the age of twenty-five hold at least a Bachelor's degree. While men and women were equally likely to finish high school, men were more likely to have completed college, 28 percent compared to 24 percent for women.[30]

Ethnicity and education rates are closing and setting new records. Eighty-eight percent of Whites graduated high school, and 79 percent of Blacks were graduates. Eighty-six percent of Asians and Pacific Islanders graduated from high school and 44 percent held a college degree compared to 28 percent for Whites and 17 percent for Blacks. For Hispanics, only 57 percent were high school graduates and 11 percent were college graduates.[31]

How does all this education relate to our standard of living? The median household income in 2000 was $42,100. The median household income for family and non-family households were $51,800 and $25,400 respectively. The median for married-couple households was $59,300 while a family maintained by a man with no spouse present was $42,100; a woman with no spouse present had a median income of $28,100.[32]

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[29] Ibid.

[30] Ibid.

[31] Ibid.

[32] Ibid.

The Northeast has the highest median income at $45,100. The South has the lowest median income among the regions with $38,400; the West and Midwest were $44,700 and $44,600 respectively. The median income by ethnicity showed Black households at $30,400; Hispanic at $33,400; White at $45,900; and Asian and Pacific Islanders at $55,500. While the median income for Asian and Pacific Islanders was the highest in the census, their income per household member was lower than that of White household members. A high household income is not a predictor of wealth. Many individuals and households with high income may be heavily in credit card or other debt. The true wealth of a person is determined by totaling all assets and subtracting all debt.[33]

The aforementioned facts make it sound like Americans are doing well financially; the truth is that 31 million people, about 11.3 percent, were at or below the poverty level. The average poverty level for a family of four was $17,603. The average amount of income needed to raise a family out of poverty was $6,820. Married couples had the lowest poverty rate, about 5 percent of the entire population and 42 percent of those in poverty. Female householder families, with no husband present, had the highest poverty rate at 25 percent, and they represented 50 percent of all poor families.[34]

Forty-nine million people in 1995 reported that they had a hard time paying for basic needs. Some lost utilities, could not make mortgage payments, unable to pay rent, and even got evicted. Of the people who experienced trouble paying for the basic needs in their life, over half of these people experienced more than one problem at a time. Nineteen percent of children lived in homes that experienced problems meeting basic

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[33] Ibid.

[34] Ibid.

needs. Fourteen percent of people between eighteen and twenty-nine did not meet basic needs, 12 percent of people between thirty and fifty-nine, and 5 percent of people sixty or older.[35]

When food shortfalls occurred, it usually lasted for over a week, and it is estimated that it would take $100 to get these people back in budget. When asked where they would go for help during such times, the vast majority said there was help available. Most believed that the help would come from family, yet only half of those who believed the family would help actually received any help from them. Only 17 percent of the people who were in need received any help.[36]

We now turn our attention to the state of Oklahoma. It became the forty-sixth state in 1907. Oklahoma's population is very diverse with fifty-five distinct Native American tribes. Oklahoma was named such by Allen Wright, the Principle Chief of the Choctaw Nation, by combining two Choctaw words meaning "red person." Oklahoma has the third highest percentage of Native Americans in the country, and in pure numbers it has the largest population. The state has more manmade lakes than any other state due to its semi-arid climate. In 1995 it suffered the worst terrorist attack in U.S. history, at the time, when the Alfred P. Murrah Federal Building was bombed by a domestic terrorist, killing 168 people.[37]

The estimated population of the state in 2006 was 3,579,212, which was an increase of 3.7 percent since April of 2000. The population breakdown by ethnic group

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[35] Ibid.

[36] Ibid.

[37] Oklahoma Background Statistics, http://www.statemaster.com/state/OK-oklahoma/bac-background (accessed January 21, 2011).

was 2,803,755 White; 278,849 Black; 287,728 American Indian and Alaska Native; 60,201 Asian; 3,429 Hawaiian and other Pacific Islander; 145,250 reporting two or more races; and 247,450 Hispanic or Latino. [38] The state occupies 68,667.06 square miles with a population of one person for every fifty and one-third square mile.[39]

In 2004 there were 51,306 births; 34,483 deaths; and 411 infant deaths. Fifty-one percent of the population had lived in the same house for at least the last five years between 1995 and 2000. The number of housing units in 2006 was 1,607,349, representing a 6.1 percent increase since 2000 but 2.9 percent less than the national average. Sixty-eight percent of Oklahomans owned their own homes, which is 2.2 percent above the national average. There are 2.49 persons, on average, per household. The median household income in 2004 was $37,109, which is $7,225 below the national average with 14 percent of the population living below the poverty level, which is 1.3 percent higher than the national average.[40]

The number of high school graduates in 2000, as represented by those twenty-five or older, was 80.6 percent just .2 percent above the national average and those with a Bachelor's degree or higher was 20.3 percent, which is 2.3 percent below the national average. The average Oklahoman travels just over twenty minutes to work, which is four minutes less than the national average.[41]

Personal income in 2005 was $29,948 per capita, which was $4,523 less than the national average. The unemployment rate in 2006 was 4 percent, .6 percent less then the

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[38] MapStats, http://www.fedstats.gov/qf/states/40000.html (accessed January 21, 2011).

[39] Ibid.

[40] Ibid.

[41] Ibid.

national average. The total number of firms in 2002 was 291,610. The ethnic breakdown is 2.6 percent were Black-owned; 5.9 percent American Indian and Alaska Native owned; 1.6 percent Asian; .1 percent Native Hawaiian and Other Pacific Islander; 1.9 percent Hispanic; and 25.7 percent were owned by women.[42]

The median age of the population is slightly over thirty-six years of age. The percentage of foreign born persons from Asia is 26.3 percent; Europe 9.4 percent; and Mexico 46.1 percent. It is estimated that there are 46,000 illegal immigrants in the state. The percentage of persons with disabilities between the age of 21 and 64 is 17 percent.[43]

The military is very important, especially in context to the location of the church that this paper is about so a few facts about those serving in the military are here presented. There were 620 Air Force recruits; 1416 Army recruits; 603 Navy recruits. The total number of recruits is 2,639, of which the Marines and Coast Guard make up the remainder.[44]

How do Oklahomans support their children? First of all, 45.9 percent of all children age five and under are read to everyday. It is reported that sixty-five percent of all children attend religious services weekly. Fifty percent of households are married-couple families, and two-fifths have their own children residing with them. Nearly fifty percent of married-couple families have both the husband and wife in the work force. The state has 25.1 percent of its male population that has never been married, and 18.8 percent of the state's women have never married.[45]

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[42] Ibid.

[43] Oklahoma Background Statistics.

[44] Ibid.

[45] Ibid.

Housing in Oklahoma tends to be primarily owner occupied. The median monthly housing cost for owner-occupied property is $871 and for renters is $525. The percentage of mobile homes is about 9.5 percent. The home heating costs are mostly driven by the cost of natural gas, as three out of four homes are heated by gas, and most of the electricity is generated by gas fired plants.[46]

Oklahoma has an obesity rate of 22 percent but an overweight and obesity rate of 56.2 percent. There is a prevalence of poor mental health as seen in the percentage of those affected at 33.4 percent. This probably accounts for the four hundred seventy-six suicides during this reporting period. And the state has a teenage birth rate of 55.9 per 1,000 teen girls.[47]

The statistics for Oklahoma County are virtually one and the same as that of Oklahoma's largest city, Oklahoma City. The population of the county is, as of 2006, 691,266, showing an increase of 4.7 since 2000. There are 57,341 children under the age of five; 180,627 children under the age of 18; and 85,045 persons over the age of 65. The female population represents 51.3 percent of this population.[48]

The ethnic breakdown, in 2006, is 515,915 White (74.6 percent); 107,531 Black (15.6 percent); 23,759 American Indian and Alaska Native (3.4 percent); 23,333 Asian (3.4 percent); 884 Hawaiian and other Pacific Islander (.1 percent); 19,844 persons

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[46] Ibid.

[47] Ibid.

[48] MapStats, http://www.fedstates.gov/qf/states/40/40109.html (accessed January 21, 2011).

reporting two or more races (2.9 percent); 82,331 Hispanic or Latino (11.9 percent). The number of births in 2004 was 11,776; deaths 6,147; infant deaths 121.[49]

Forty-seven percent of the population had lived in the same house for at least the last five years between 1995 and 2000. The number of housing units in 2006 was 316,637, representing a 7.3 percent increase since 2000 and 1.2 percent more than the state average. Sixty percent of Oklahomans county residents owned their own homes, which is 8 percent below the state average. There are 2.41 persons, on average, per household. The median household income in 2004 was $37,967, which is $858 above the state average with 15.2 percent of the population living below the poverty level, which is 1.2 percent higher than the state average.[50]

The number of high school graduates in 2000, as represented by those twenty-five or older, was 82.5 percent just 1.9 percent above the state average and those with a Bachelor's degree or higher was 25.4 percent, which is 5.1 percent above the state average. The average Oklahoma county resident travels just over twenty minutes to work, which is equal to the state average.[51]

Personal income in 2005 was $36,176 per capita, which was $6,228 more than the state average. The unemployment rate in 2006 was 4.1 percent, .1 percent more then the state average. The total number of firms in 2002 was 62,369. The ethnic breakdown is 4.9 percent were Black-owned; 3.2 percent American Indian and Alaska Native owned; 2.8 percent Asian; 2.7 percent Hispanic; and 26.1 percent were owned by women.[52]

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[49] Ibid.

[50] Ibid.

[51] Ibid.

[52] Ibid.

Oklahoma County encompasses more than just one city. The greater Oklahoma City metro area actually covers several counties. Midwest City is situated just seven to ten miles east of Oklahoma City proper with the city of Del City sandwiched inbetween Midwest City is considered to be a part of the greater Oklahoma City metro area. Midwest City had a population, in 2007, of 55,935, which is an increase of 2.5 percent since 2000. The gender breakdown is 26,718 males, 47.8 percent of the population and 29,217 females, 52.2 percent of the population.[53]

The ethnic breakdown for the population is 67.6 percent White; 19.5 percent Black; 5.9 percent American Indian. There were also 4.2 percent reported as being of two races or more; 4.1 percent Hispanic.[54]

The median resident age for Midwest City is thirty-four years of age. The estimated median household income in 2007 was $41,401. The median house value was $95,629, which is about $7,400 less than the state average.[55]

Midwest City sits at an elevation of 1,250 feet above sea level. It has a land area of twenty-four and one-half square miles and has a population density of 2,274 people per square mile.[56]

Educationally, 85.6 percent of the residents over the age of twenty-five have a high school education or higher. Seventeen percent of those residing in Midwest City have a Bachelor's degree or higher and 5.3 percent have a professional degree. The

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[53] City Data for Midwest City, Oklahoma, http://www.city-data.com/city/Midwest -City-Oklahoma.html (accessed January 21, 2011).

[54] Ibid.

[55] Ibid.

[56] Ibid.

unemployment rate in this city is 5.3 percent, and of those employed the mean travel time to work is twenty minutes.[57]

Fifty-two percent of the adult population reports being married. Twenty-three percent of the population has never married, 1.9 percent is separated, 7.2 percent are widowed, and 15.3 percent report that they are divorced. Of the residents, 1,801 report being foreign born, with 1.6 percent Asian, .8 percent European, and .7 percent from Latin America.[58]

May 3, 1999, produced the largest tornado in history that rolled through Midwest City along its journey of more than 36 miles. It spawned more than 60 smaller tornados as it made its way to and beyond Midwest City from its beginning near Chickasha, Oklahoma, which is southwest of Midwest City. It contained maximum winds of between 261 and 318 miles per hour, killing thirty-six and injuring five hundred eighty-three persons. It also produced over one billion dollars in damages. It missed the center of Midwest City by 3.3 miles, but it demolished a one mile strip along Interstate 40, just on the north side of the access road (Southwest 29th Street).

This single disaster changed the complexion of the city. The retail center of the city had been located at Reno Avenue and Air Depot Boulevard, where there is a large mall. Southwest 29th Street was rebuilt as a strip mall, and almost all of the existing businesses in the existing mall moved two miles south thus relocating the center of retail to that area. It also brought in additional retail businesses and new restaurants that had not existed in Midwest City prior to the tornado.

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[57] Ibid.

[58] Ibid.

The average household size is 2.4 people. This is just .1 people per household less than the state average in 2007. Sixty-six percent are reported as family households and 4.3 percent are reported as being households with unmarried partners. 13.9 percent of the residents had income levels below the poverty level in 2007, which is .8 percent below the state average. It is also reported that 5.6 percent of the residents had an income level that was 50 percent below the poverty level.[59]

The city of Midwest City is surrounded by other cities on all sides. Most of the cities are of slightly lower or lower income levels and standards of living. Some of the rural areas are experiencing an economic boom as middle and upper middle class families are moving to these areas and building new higher end homes.

There are one hundred fifty-eight churches in the Mid-Del area. Southern Baptists represents 20.1 percent of the churches and 40.1 percent of church attendees; the United Methodist Church represents 8.9 percent of the churches and 14.3 percent of attendees; the Catholic Church represents 4 percent of the churches and 9.8 percent of attendees; the Churches of Christ represent 9.2 percent of churches and 4.1 percent of attendees; the Assemblies of God represent 6.3 percent of churches and 4 percent of attendees; Charismatic Independent Churches represent 1.2 percent of churches and 3.3 percent of attendees; the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ) represents 4 percent of the churches and 3.2 percent of attendees; the Church of the Nazarene represents 6.1 percent of the churches and 3.1 percent of attendees; International Pentecostal Holiness Church

[59] Ibid.

represents 5.1 percent of the churches and 2.8 percent of attendees; and all other religions represent 35.1 percent of the places to worship and 15.2 percent of attendees.[60]

Saint Matthew United Methodist Church is located near the old retail center of the city of Midwest City. It is two blocks north of the intersection of Reno Avenue on Air Depot Boulevard, directly across the street from the city's only mall.

Five of the original members still attend very faithfully each week. The church currently has 1,047 members on the books. Average weekly attendance is around 240 combined in two worship serves each Sunday. There is an early service, before the Sunday school hour, and a traditional service after.

The major employer in the city is Tinker Air Force Base. There is a mix of civilian and military workers that number over 30,000. The church attracts military families who are reassigned each two to four years. When they move, they do not always change their membership to another United Methodist church, and if they go to another denomination, there is no communication from the new church. Therefore our membership numbers are high, but no one is sure where most of these people are presently.

The gender breakdown in the church is five hundred eighty-eight females and four hundred fifty-nine males, 56 percent and 44 percent respectively. The ethnic breakdown is 1,032 White; 10 Black; 2 Native Americans; 1 Asian; and 2 Multi-Racial.

The church experienced some financial problems, and the debt on the sanctuary had to be refinanced to afford a new, and most needed, roof. The roof cost $133,000 and was replaced in approximately 1998. The new roof fixed the leakage problem for a short time but began leaking again long before the warranty ran out. The warranty proved to be

[60] Ibid.

worthless. At present time the church is saddled with a half million dollar debt. With this debt and lower attendance, which led to lower giving, the church fell financially short. A new pastor was brought in and he began to reorganize the church. Attendance did not bounce back, and many adjustments had to be made to the budget.

The church is attended by about one-third retired people. Many of these attendees are retired military, of those most were officers. Over half of those attending are still active in the work force, and half of them have children. The remainder of the attendees are youth and children. The church has a good mix generationally, and they interact well together. Confirmation classes pair each child with an adult mentor who works with the youth for thirteen weeks. Each year the church holds "Family Camp" at one of the conference camps during April. It is well attended, with as many as half the congregation going.

Church school attendance over the past ten years has between eighty-three and one hundred eight. The children's Sunday school in the past year had gone down to about eight children, but in the last ten months has rebounded to about twenty-three. Adult Sunday school has seen a decline from one hundred twenty-five, at it ten year high, to sixty. The attendance of youth has grown over the last ten years from a low of nine to a high of forty-three and currently holding at about twenty-nine.

Worship attendance has remained somewhat constant over the last ten years. Membership on the other hand has grown by about fifty members over the same time period. This lack of growth in worship may be due to the flux of the military church membership and their reassignments. During the last ten years the worship average did dip to two hundred fifteen in 2006. The church is blessed with three or more visitors per

week on the average. They are welcomed and contacted after the service but continued contact is rare.

The church is surrounded by many apartments. Many of these are gated due to the perceived crime rate. The higher end apartments are usually occupied by military officers and younger executive couples. Some are lower income where you might find low ranking enlisted military. These same apartments also contain low income civilians, some of whom are minimum wage workers.

While all are welcome at Saint Matthew, those who live in the upscale apartments are people that the church population would seek out and invite. Those who live in the lower income are also welcome but few are willing to reach out to them and invite them to church.

The church, at one point in its history, was active in missions inside and outside of the church. They took many trips to Alaska and Mexico to work with natives and to help build churches. They began a yearly project, "Youth Force" where they worked in the state of Oklahoma doing repair work on people's homes that do not have the resources to keep them up. Over the last three years, while the youth continued to work on the homes of the elderly and poor, the rest of the church tuned inward and concentrated on the economic problems of the church.

The racial demographics of the church, while diverse, are not in line with the surrounding population. They have begun to change in the last ten months but still are not in line with the population. It will be important in the future that the church begins to reach out to the surrounding area, since many of the members that attend no longer live within a five mile radius of the church. It is also going to be important that the church

start to focus more outward, as they begin to see the surrounding population they will be more apt to reach out to them.

APPENDIX B

ST. MATTHEW UNITED METHODIST CHURCH'S BEGINNING

The following is an account of St. Matthew United Methodist Churches beginning and its growth through 2005. This account is given by one of the original charter members; Mr. Carl Sims.

> On 12 October 1952, the first meeting of this church was in Country Estates grade school, with 25 hearty and courageous people who heeded the call of the Master to "Go out into the world and spread the good news.
>
> This first meeting was called by District Superintendent Dr. Leland Clegg in the cafeteria area of the Country Estates school building. The church was named Country Estates Methodist. Dr. Clegg assigned a student minister, Mr. George Stewart from Oklahoma City University to hold Sunday services until June 1963(1953). This was the month our first ordained pastor Rev. Lloyd Vinnedge arrived to take charge. He moved into the first church parsonage located at 306 East Rose Drive in Midwest City. This was a two bedroom, one car garage size home. A loan from Mr. B. C. Clark of Oklahoma City made it possible to purchase the first parsonage. One of the adult Sunday school classes of St. Luke's Methodist Church in Oklahoma City helped pay the salary of Rev. Lloyd Vinnedge in years 1953 and 1954.
>
> In 1953, Marian Frost established the first adult choir and the WSCS Women's group was organized with Dorothy Price as president. In June 1953 we moved locations from the cafeteria building to the Country Estates gymnasium area. This move gave us more than double the area for our first meetings.
>
> In January 1955, Rev. Lloyd Vinnedge returned to college to teach full time and Rev. John Keefe was assigned to our church. Year 1955 the Methodist Men's group was organized and the same year the church's name was changed from Country Estates Methodist to Saint Matthew Methodist Church. We had plans to buy land and build a church building.
>
> January 1956 this present location of five acres of land was purchased and the first unit of the church building was completed in July of 1956 at a cost of about $28,000. Midwest City water lines were not at this location, so a water well was drilled 130 feet deep to supply our needs. (Three) 3 long lateral lines served as the sewer drain. Our building was the first completed on Air Depot Street north of Reno Street. Across, west, from here was a single farm house with a peach orchard.
>
> June 1957 throu (through) May 1963 Rev. Wayne Segars served as minister. The church continued to grow in membership.

We added the first sanctuary, lobby, office area and 4 Sunday class rooms. This second addition was completed in December 1960.

May 1963 Rev. Mackinzie Thompson was assigned and plans were formulated for additional educational facilities with our present large kitchen.

This kitchen and 7 class rooms was completed in 1964. From 1969 to 1979 Rev. Jack King was pastor. The church parking lot was upgraded to a concrete surface. Our parking surface area had been black top as well as rock gravel chips around the building.

1979 Rev. Jack Atkinson was assigned and with membership growing we added the Pipe Organ in 1983. This pipe organ was moved from the first sanctuary to the new "permanent" sanctuary.

1986 Rev. Nick Blackford was assigned and in the fall of 1988 the charge conference decided to look at the possibility of building a "permanent" sanctuary that had been conceived some 30 years earlier. Early 1990 plans were completed for this new sanctuary. Ground breaking was held Oct(ober)14, 1990 and the 440 seat sanctuary was ready to move into on 13 Oct(ober) 1991. 1991 was year for start of Pumpkin Patch.

Jan(uary) 1997 Rev. Richard Whetsell was assigned. The church continued to serve various needs to the area with "Meals on Wheels" and etc. He moved to Alaska in May 2005.

APPENDIX C

POSTCARDS

St. Matthew
United Methodist
300 N Air Depot
Midwest City, OK 73110

Non-Profit Org.
U.S. Postage
PAID
OKLAHOMA CITY, OK
PERMIT # 302

First Post Card Front
Size 7.5 X 6.75 inches

Remember Ice Cream Socials and Neighborhood Block Parties?

THEY'RE BACK!

"The Way" at St. Matthew UMC is throwing a party for the neighborhoods this summer as a way of helping neighbors get to know their neighbors.

We will furnish the Ice cream, bowls, spoons, drinks and name tags, to help everyone feel comfortable—all you need to do is just come and have fun (if you can bring your favorite topping or some dessert to share.)

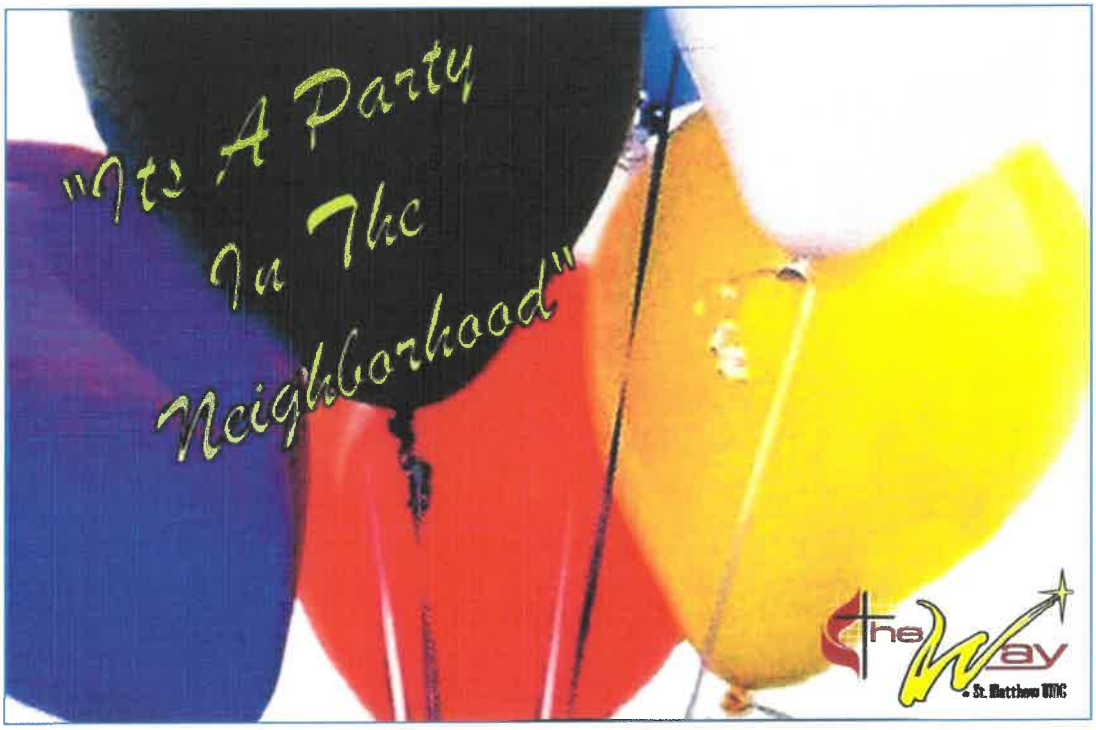
Kids, we will have a table set up to help you build your own kite.

Come and Join the Fun!

Watch for information about date and time for your neighborhood.

Sound like fun and want to help?
Call Ron at St. Matthew 732-6831

First Post Card Back
Size 7.5 X 6.75 inches



Second Post Card Front
Size 8.5 X 5.5 inches

It's Your Turn for Summer Fun. We are traveling the area throwing Ice Cream Neighborhood parties. Why? As a way to get people to know their neighbors. So, come join us and meet your neighbors for dessert and fellowship on

Sept. 3rd from 6:30-8:00 PM at St. Matthew UMC
300 North Air Depot on the Front Lawn

We will bring the Ice Cream, bowls, spoons and drinks. You bring the family and your favorite topping to share with others. ***(Build your own kite table for the kids)***

See you there! *Sponsored by "The Way"@ St. Matthew UMC*

St. Matthew United Methodist
300 N Air Depot
Midwest City, OK 73110

Non-Profit Org
U.S. Postage
PAID
OKLAHOMA CITY, OK
PERMIT #302

Second Post Card Back
Size 8.5 X 5.5 inches

WORSHIP YOUR WAY
Sunday Mornings

8:30-9:30 am

Come and join our smaller worship gathering. It's a place to meet people easily and a time of intimate worship which culminates with Holy Communion.

Casual dress and a laid-back atmosphere make this a special service for those who attend.

Christian Discipleship follows this service for adults and children alike for those who want to grow deeper in their faith and make more friends.

9:45-10:45 am

This service is truly a come as you are service with casual dress.

The music is high energy contemporary with just the right amount of Christianized Rock-N-Roll thrown in to keep things fun while we worship and praise God.

Christian Discipleship follows this service for adults and children alike for those who want to grow deeper in their faith and make more friends.

11:00-12:00 am

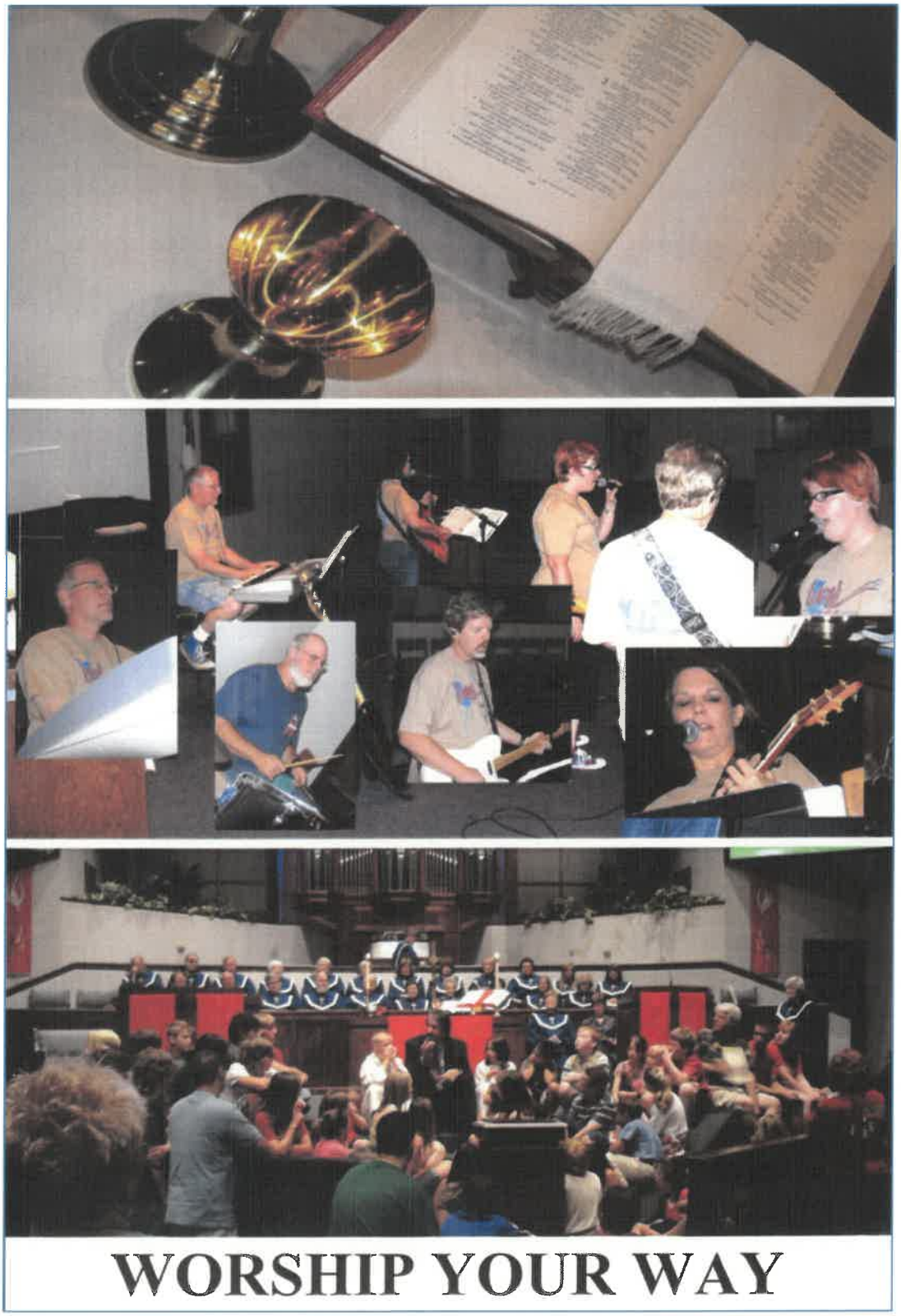
This is a traditional worship service which uses a variety of music and liturgy. It also offers the experience of a full choir, hand bells, special music and a beautiful pipe organ being played by the hands of a most talented musician.

This is the service for you if you enjoy a more traditional worship style. Dress is casual so you still don't have to dress up unless you want to and if you do you won't feel out of place.

St. Matthew UMC
300 N Air Depot
Midwest City, OK 73110

Non-Profit Org
U.S. Postage
PAID
OKLAHOMA CITY, OK
PERMIT #302

Third Post Card Back
Size 6 X 9 inches



Third Post Card Front
Size 6 X 9 inches

APPENDIX D

SURVEY

This post project survey was given to all persons attending the new worship service. It is presented to give feedback to the projects objectives of starting a new contemporary worship service and attracting new people to that service and the church as a whole. The results show clearly that the objectives of the project were met. Some of the respondents do not live in the target area and therefore may have only gotten one post card. The answers to the questions asked are based on a scale of 1-10 with 1 representing non-effectiveness and 10 representing high-effectiveness. A section was added for comments and testimonials.

The following is a composite of the response to the various questions asked.

1. How aware of the advertising campaign to begin the new worship service were you? Median Score 6.4
2. If you received the mailings yourself, how would rate them as a point of invitation? Median Score 8.9
3. How effective do you believe the advertising, post card campaign, was in attracting new guest to the church? Median Score 6.5
4. How effective was the goal of starting a new worship service as a point of interest in drawing new guest to church? Median Score 8.5
5. Were you aware of the Ice Cream Socials that were being held? Median Score 6.3
6. How effective was the idea of the church reaching out to the neighborhoods in drawing new people to the church as guests? Median Score 7.5

Some of the comments received:

1. Post cards worked better than I expected. With more advertising, more people would have been drawn to St. Matthew.
2. The new service seems to be attractive to visitors. It is slowly but surely catching on.
3. The Way Service is attracting more and more people and attendance is increasing at a blessed rate.
4. The new worship service gave us something to talk to others about that was easy. In other words, it gives us a reason to talk with people, something new and exciting.
5. I don't know how many times you sent them out but you might want to mail again.

Some of the testimonials received:

1. We have just started coming to this church and we have really enjoyed it. [Started attending in March because of the mailings sent in August and September.]
2. I love The Way service! It helps me feel more connected to God through the music, prayers and proclamation of God's word. It has helped me become closer to the others who worship in this service due to the fellowship.
3. I brought my family to the Annual Pumpkin Patch [which started three weeks after the advertising campaign] when Pastor Ron came out and talked to us. The next morning we started attending The Way service. Through the message at "The

Way" service my two children accepted Christ into their lives and my family have become members of the church.

Survey

Considering the project to begin a new contemporary worship service at St. Matthew UMC, please answer the following questions by rating them on a scale of 1-10 with 1 being not effective and 10 being extremely effective.

1. How aware of the advertising campaign to begin the new worship service were you?
   1☐ 2☐ 3☐ 4☐ 5☐ 6☐ 7☐ 8☐ 9☐ 10☒
2. If you revived the mailings yourself, how would you rate them as a point of invitation?
   1☐ 2☐ 3☐ 4☐ 5☐ 6☐ 7☐ 8☐ 9☐ 10☐ N/A☒
3. How effective do you believe the advertising, post card campaign, was in attracting new guest to the church?
   1☐ 2☐ 3☐ 4☐ 5☐ 6☐ 7☐ 8☒ 9☐ 10☐
4. How effective was the goal of starting a new worship service as a point of interest in drawing new guest to the church?
   1☐ 2☐ 3☐ 4☐ 5☐ 6☐ 7☐ 8☒ 9☐ 10☐
5. Were you aware of the Ice Cream Socials that were being held?
   1☐ 2☐ 3☐ 4☐ 5☐ 6☐ 7☐ 8☐ 9☐ 10☒
6. How effective was the idea of the church reaching out to the neighborhoods in drawing new people to the church as guest?
   1☐ 2☐ 3☐ 4☐ 5☐ 6☐ 7☐ 8☒ 9☐ 10☐

Comments: Results were better than I expected. With more advertising, more people would have been drawn to St. Matthew.

Testimonials:
I love The Way Home! It helps me feel more connected to God through the music, prayer and proclamation of God's word. It has helped me become closer to the others who worship in this service due to the fellowship.

Survey Sample

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